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DEC. 17, 1927

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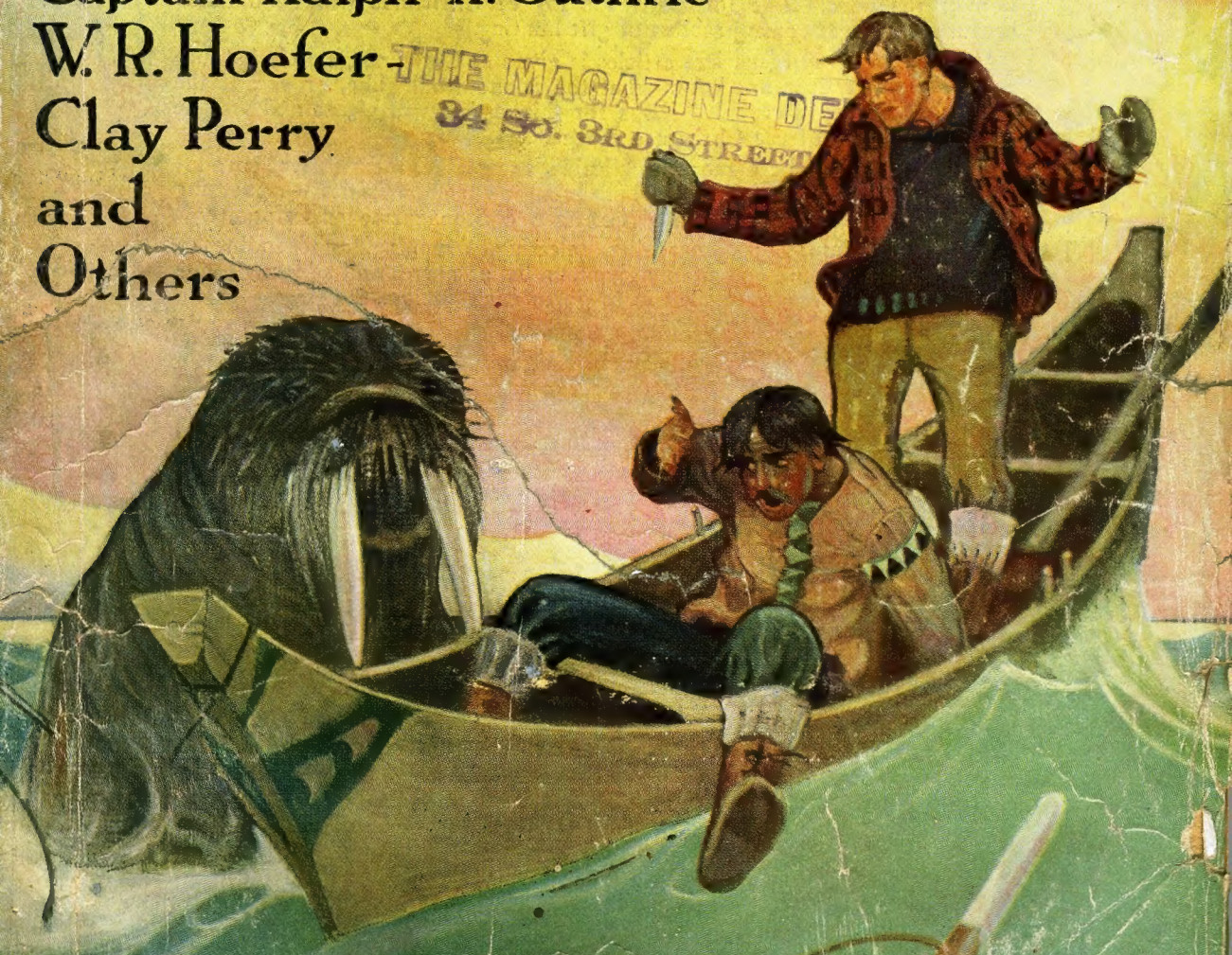

THE LAST ATLANTIDE

BY

FRED MAC ISAAC

THE TA[illegible] CONTINENT

A STREET and SMITH PUBLICATION

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Very soon the holiday season with all the gayety and delight of it will be upon us. "What to give" for Christmas is already becoming the question of the hour But for many the joy of Christmas will be dimmed because of the vexatious problem of gift hunting.

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Volume LXXXVII Number 5

WEEKLY
The Popular Stories

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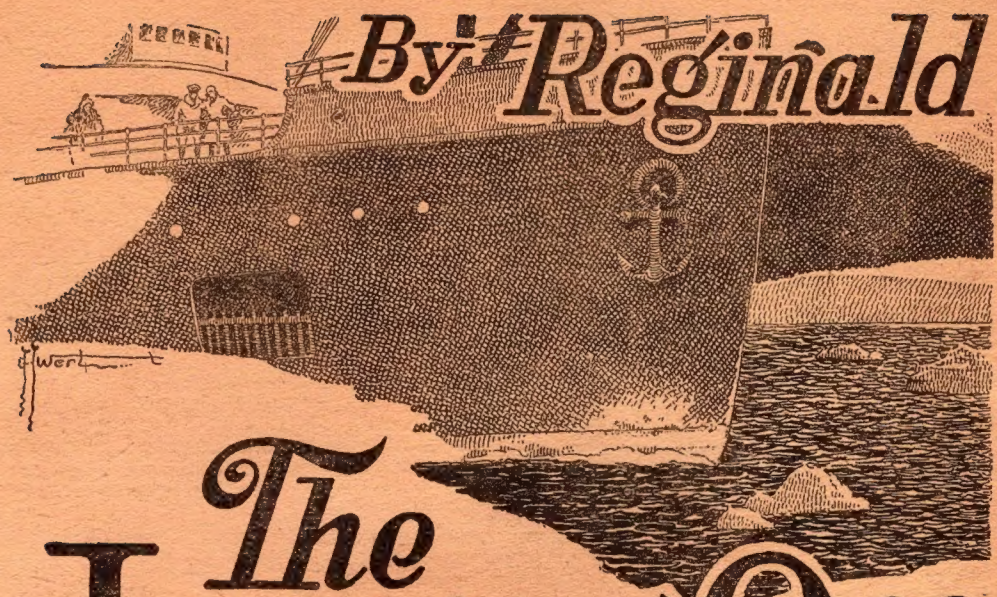


By Reginald

The Jumping-Off

Author of "Money to Burn," "The Yankee Ambassador," Etc.

The story of a stalwart, enduring friendship. A young professor of geology those of his chum's fiancée, goes forth on the long, grueling quest—far, far up into great enough, but young Bedford did something greater than that in the end. He

CHAPTER I.

BROWN COAL.

THIS narrow, book-lined room was baking. *"Phew!"* said the instructor in geology, seated alone before a pile of examination papers.

He went at them again. Perspiration dampened his fingers—made his grip on the blue pencil dubious:

Q: What is the conformity of the Eocene Telluride, San Miguel and Poison Canyon formations (Colorado) with the underlying Laramie rocks?

A: There is great unconformity.

Bedford's weary pencil marked that, "7."

"Damn!" he said.

Sick of this sort of thing. Dead sick of it.

Merely two years lay between him and the time when he was himself an undergraduate—but a dismally dull two. Those days might have been one of the distant world-formation epochs wherewith these papers dealt. His pursuit of geology had been as enthusiastic—and as successful—as his work at stroke oar on the crew, yet only poverty forced him into the faculty. All his dreams, except one, were of wild mountain and wooded valley, of the edge of civilization and lands still mapless, where his knowledge and strength could turn hard knocks into a livelihood. His realities were gray routine, with vacations in the Adirondacks.

Wright Kauffman

Place

learns that his old chum has been lost up in the arctic, and, to still his own fears and the Bering Sea. For a man softened by civilized life to undertake such a task was stilled the call of his own heart and submitted gracefully to the inevitable.

"I don't want to *teach* about Poison Canyons—I want to *fight* 'em!"

As he stood up, stretching his strong arms, Gage Bedford, Dr. Chem., Dr. Phys. Sc., certainly appeared as one built for the wilderness rather than for the classroom. Dark, tall, he carried himself as the athlete does. He possessed an honestly conscientious air; hard study had drawn a frown between his somber eyes. Nevertheless, there was no misjudging that breadth of shoulder and depth of chest. If he sometimes saw visions, he owned the physical ability to win them—given half a chance.

Motes danced across the June sunlight pouring through the open window. Boyish shouts and the laughter of young women came from the campus—and a knock at the door.

"All right!" called Bedford.

There entered a spacious gentleman of wide face, of obvious business experience, having an equally obvious cigar in one corner of his mouth. Uninvited, he puffingly installed his bulk in an easy-chair across the desk:

"Doctor Bedford?"

"Yes."

For all his fat, the newcomer's gaze was sharp. He used it on his puzzled host before again speaking:

"Hot."

"It *is* hot."

"I'm Edmunds. J. T.—of Edmunds, Folsom & Gerry. Got my letter and those specimens last week?"

Bedford understood at last. As an academic metallurgist and chemist, his reputation had spread. People often consulted him. His latest consultants—by post—were this new firm of wealthy Boston capitalists. Edmunds, Folsom & Gerry went in for many financial adventures. Just now they appeared to be turning toward "brown coal." In northern Alabama, they had come across what they hoped was a lignite-bearing continuation of the so-called Wilcox formation found in the State of Mississippi.

"Yes," said the geologist, "I got your letter and acknowledged receipt; but I thought, firstly——"

"Didn't expect me to call, eh? Well, I'm not strong for the mail where a personal interview's possible. Had some business in Utica, so that I might as well run over to Syracuse. Ready for me?"

Bedford's studious frown deepened.

"Not with any good news."

"I remember what you wrote, of course; but that was only theoretical. We've found gray clays and sands and lignitic fossils at a minimum depth of nine hundred feet, just like the Mississippi show—and that has lignite veins ninety-five inches thick."

"Hilgard called the Wilcox formation lignitic, but——"

"Have you made your tests on my samples, doctor? All I want's tests."

Gage opened the top drawer of his desk, took out an X-ray photograph and handed it to the capitalist.

"Here's a picture of one of your specimens after complete combustion of its carbonaceous material—a piece about an inch thick. It shows the stratified character of the ash—those thin parallel bands. The combustible portion remains transparent." The blue pencil pointed. "See here—and here. There's too much ash, too high a percentage of unconsumable mineral matter."

Edmunds cocked his broad head, cigar atilt.

"Um. I know: Couriot's test. Not a standard. I'm informed the fire test's the only standard one."

"I applied it last night." A block of the brown coal had been burned rapidly and then conveyed to the study mantlepiece; the noncarbonaceous material showed in ominously thick bands of yellow and gray. "There is the result."

"Eh?" Edmunds rose and peered.

"Firstly"—this numerical habit of speech was the sole scholastic trick of which Gage couldn't get rid—"there's less than sixty per cent of carbon, and that's too low for commercial purposes. Secondly, the oxygen and hydroscopic water are too high. My complete analysis is still in the form of rough notes, but if you care to look at them——"

He put some papers into the Bostonian's fist. Without a glance, the Bostonian tore them across and dropped the bits into a convenient wastebasket.

"Don't have to look at them. You're the expert; your word goes. It boils down to this—don't it?—we're licked."

"I'm afraid so."

"Stuff's not even good enough for paint?"

"You couldn't compete with the 'Cologne earth' of Germany. I'm sorry."

"Save your sympathy. We'll just let the option lapse, that's all." Edmunds sat down again and lit a fresh cigar; he seemed to regret his Alabama venture no more than he regretted the stump of tobacco that he tossed into the empty fireplace. "But the firm's going ahead elsewhere."

"Yes?" Gage said.

"Yes!" With sudden expansiveness, the large man leaned toward the young and slim one. "Doctor, I like the prompt way you handled this job, and I like your looks."

"Thanks."

"Well, we've got the lignite bee bad. Not much market here, but it's a fact the Helmstadt and Hungarian and nearly all the known supplies are decreasing fast, whereas the big European demand goes right on growing. We want to find lignite, and we want to hire a live wire to do it."

Gage felt the blood rise to his cheeks. The caller went on:

"Looked you up thoroughly. Just now had a talk with the president of your university here, too, and even he vouches for you." Edmunds winked ponderously. "Does his word go?"

"I'd accept it." But Bedford blushed brightly.

"Then do you know what he said? He's a good friend of yours, boy. He said to take you away—get you out of doors—because you were worth more than all the books you taught from. And I said: 'Mr. President, if this fellow sizes up when I see him, he can have a four-thousand-dollar-and-expenses contract, for a starter, with Edmunds, Folsom & Gerry that'll keep his legs on the go around the world just as long as he makes good.'" The heavy man rose. "Well, you do size up, doctor—and that's anyhow better pay than a professor's. How about it?"

Gage was also on his feet. That narrow study was narrower than ever, far too narrow to hold his dreams, which trooped in at the window wearing the glad colors of realization.

"Why, I—if my work here—if Doctor Flint——"

"Said you could leave to-morrow. There's a district down in Chile we want looked at, and you could be on your way by Saturday."

"Of course, I——"

"Oh"—Edmunds quieted him with the extension of a plump palm—"I don't want to hurry you. Take your time. I've got to get to New York by the next train, but I understand you'll want to think it over. Our New York office's address is on this card. All you've got to do is send me a wire there anywhere inside forty-eight hours. If you accept, you can have twenty-four hours more before you come on there and meet me for a talk Friday evening. The boat sails Saturday."

He wouldn't listen to an answer. The door closed behind him.

Gage wanted to run after him, wanted to verify his account of what the university's president had said, wanted to file telegraphic acceptance immediately. Think it over? Of what else except such a chance as this had he been thinking for twenty-four dull months? He was alone in the world. If the president was willing——

Bedford put a hand upon the doornob. He would have gone out had his eyes not then encountered something that bound him to a past antedating his days of drudgery. It hung framed beside the door; it was nothing more important than the picture of a girl whom he had never seen and—he told himself—never might see.

CHAPTER II.

A FRIEND—OR A FUTURE?

THAT spiritual ovaled pictured face looked down at him and said: "Wait." Why? This was no woman with any claim on Gage Bedford. What she recalled was only an undergraduate friendship with Russell Dean.

Russell, who had for four years been his roommate and classmate, was Californian, blond, athletic, trusting, but, for all his love of a joke, with romance the keynote of his character and an enthusiastic sense of chivalry inherited, through gold-questing Forty-niners, from an old Virginia line. Dean had developed and maintained a boyish worship for the slightly older Bedford, and always vowed a friendship like that ex-

isting among his favorites of fiction, "The Three Musketeers."

When he returned from vacation a senior, after working his way to Europe on a cattle boat, he brought this print and a miniature showing the same face. It had touched, lightly, Bedford's young fancy. There was about it a wistfulness, an honesty, yet the hint of mysticism; a perfection, perhaps lent by the artist's brush——

"Who is she?" Gage had asked.

"Vivien," Russell replied, smiling.

"I'd like to know her."

Russell laughed outright.

"You poor boob, you can't. I tell you it's 'Vivien'—Botticelli's 'Vivien'—and so the model's been dead about four hundred years. It's not one of the old guy's well-known pictures, but I took a shine to it in Florence this summer."

That was all—then. But at graduation, Dean timidly offered to leave the print in exchange for a photograph of Bedford, saying:

"You know how I hate having my own mug snapped. This'll do for your reminder of me. As long as you keep it and I keep the miniature, we're friends. What do you say?"

"We're friends for always, anyhow."

Russell's big, gray eyes fired at that, and he gripped Gage's hand. "The way we have been since we both came here! Of course, you're sticking at the university, and I've got to help my dad in California—I'm all he has left now—but, no matter what happens, we'll stay friends. We're both starting life poor men; still, if ever you need me, a letter'll bring me back."

It was Gage's turn to smile, yet he was touched. His voice rang out with sincerity:

"If you need *me*—wire."

Two years—but had they ended something that was merely a boy's impossible ideal of friendship? The young men wrote to each other, at first almost weekly, then once a month, now once in six months. Bedford had nothing to tell, Dean no good news. He was still sharing with his father the unprofitably adventurous spirit of their ancestors. This spring there had come no letter from Russell at all.

Bedford thought of the outfit he must get—boots, a poncho, blankets, tramping-and-riding coat and breeches, camp-cooking utensils, a pup tent. His dark gaze saw mountain ranges; his imagination showed him exploring canyons, tapping rocks. There were some telegraph forms in a desk drawer; he got one out and took up his blue pencil.

A bee buzzed in on the hot Syracuse sunlight. And a second knock sounded at Gage's door.

After those exam papers, probably. Bedford's response was impatient:

"Come in!"

A young woman hesitated on the threshold.

He looked at her from the feet upward. *Bois-de-rose* suede shoes, *bois-re-rose* trimly tailored skirt; a hat of *bois-de-rose* in two tones, broad brimmed in front, cut off short and tight fitting to the edge of her close-cropped hair at the back of her neck. A lithe figure, yet sturdy. All this seen in an instant. Queer, though: the gloveless hands, at once calm and strong, were like those of that print beside her, and folded like them. Gage's head shot up; he was looking at the mystic face—Botticelli's "Vivien" had entered his room.

"You're——" he gasped.

The red lips parted over even teeth. The visitor came forward quickly, putting out an impulsive hand.

"My name is Kyra Carrington."

Gage blinked at the print. She saw it instantly.

"Russ said he'd given you that. It was just one of his jokes to pretend it was a Botticelli copy. Really it was a

copy of a painting made of me ever so long ago. He told me all about you, too."

"Then you——"

"We came to San Francisco, mother and I, while he was a junior here. He —liked me. Lately, we—we're engaged."

Bedford automatically shut the door and drew her to a chair.

"You're visiting in Syracuse? Where's Russ? He hasn't written for ever so long."

"I'm on my way West. I stopped off here to see you because I don't know just where Russ is. And I'm afraid!"

She was. He saw that she was fighting some dark fear—and losing. Tragedy? At this time, in this place, involving Russell Dean, too? The young geologist summoned all his self-command, in order to summon hers.

"Miss Carrington, do try——"

What she tried was a brave smile. It was no success.

"You may call me Kyra. You've had my picture long enough for that."

"Then, Kyra, try to tell me everything quietly."

"Russ is somewhere in Alaska—in the Aleutian Islands—on one of the Aleutian Islands out past Unalaska." Those big eyes were violets drenched by a rain of tears. "I can't stand the uncertainty——"

"Please!"

"His father had a blue-fox farm. He'd never say on exactly which island it was. Somewhere near Attu. Mr. Dean went up last summer, and nothing's been heard of him since. When spring came, Russ—he'd known there was a mystery; I think he knew what it was, but he'd promised not to tell even me—well, he was so anxious, he went up in April, as soon as boats could get through from Vancouver."

"Yes?"

"He wrote me from Sitka and said he was just starting West. After that, I didn't get any word till last week. Then I got this."

On Bedford's unromantic desk she laid a plain envelope forwarded from San Francisco to a New York hotel; the first postmark was hopelessly blurred. Gage drew out a bit of dirty paper. There, in Dean's hand, had been hastily written only five words, unprefaced by date or place line:

Send help. Quick! Am at ——

The rest had been torn away.

Poignant memories of his old friendship crowded Gage as he sat here in his quiet study. Students' voices were still audible from outside.

But this strange missive in his hand, this grief-stricken girl opposite him, brought him to reality. He must give her what encouragement he could; she was Dean's fiancée. He secured his large atlas, turned its pages.

"Show me, as near as you can, where the place is."

With a weary gesture, she took off her hat and bent close a mass of bobbed hair like pale gold.

"Here's the route." Her voice was a musical contralto. She indicated the long, curved line of islets that, separating the Pacific from Bering Sea, stretches far toward Asia. She pointed to one tiny spot between Unalaska and Attu, the farthest of them all.

"To get to the one where the fox farm is, Russ said you went past that volcano, through this channel by a big boat. Here anybody had to stop with some Aleuts—the man's name is Panteleimon—and afterward there was hardly ever anything but natives' canoes. I remember Russ telling me those Aleuts could manage them no matter how bad the seas were."

Away off in the ocean, America's western outpost that was almost of the

Orient, where the sun would be only rising when it set in Maine! Perhaps twelve hundred miles from the Alaskan shore; anything could happen there. Bedford's enforced discretion momentarily escaped him.

"Why, it's the jumping-off place!"

She nodded.

"So you think he's—he's——"

Was she going to break down a second time? Under some breath of air that stole in, those examination papers fluttered; the telegraph form was blown to the floor. Gage warned himself; betrayal of his own emotions must not again augment her apprehensions.

He avoided her searching look by recovering the form and placing it deliberately under a paper weight, the while he collected his thoughts. He would quiet her by a treatment of common sense delivered in his academic manner.

"Listen to me. Firstly"—he checked the point with his fingers—"that preliminary silence may have meant nothing. You can't expect daily letters from islands beyond the last fringe of civilization."

She was puzzled by him.

"I didn't—but you see what I did get."

"Secondly, what Russ may mean now is only that he's ill."

The girl drew back. *"Only?"* she echoed.

But Gage regarded what lay under the paper weight.

"Thirdly, you oughtn't to be alarmed until you've telegraphed up there. We can do that right off."

"There isn't any cable service"—her eyes hardened—"to the outer of those islands beyond the last fringe of civilization, or any radio. And there's nobody who'll carry any such messages to them."

"On the larger islands, or to *them?*"

"I did send."

"To the authorities?"

"Yes. All they knew was that Russ had gone on westward—and, of course, that is no more than what I knew he planned. They seemed to think it was just—they seemed to think the way you do."

"The police?"

"Police!"

"There must be naval stations and patrols."

"The answer was that 'the matter would be taken up in due course.' You know what that amounts to."

"If the newspapers were interested there——"

"If there's a secret, I haven't any right to do anything that would make it public." She was drawing farther and farther away, her tone metallic, her face picturing a growing scorn. Bedford didn't see, didn't seem to hear. "As for hiring enough help to do any good, well, we're not rolling in money, and Russ has no relations. He has no real friend out West, either; he's had to work too hard. He has no real friend anywhere, except you."

"What do you mean?"

"Mean?" She spoke loudly; her tone forced his full attention. Her head was high, her cheeks flushed, her eyes bright; the hands that had at first appeared so calm were clenched at her sides. "I meant I wanted you to go after Russ, to those islands, to wherever he is, to what you call the jumping-off place. And you—*you*——"

"Kyra—Miss Car——"

"Oh, I might have known it! Poor, trusting Russ! A friend? A man? You're just a *professor!*"

Now, at last, he understood. He understood that neither of them had understood the other. He faced her; whatever had remained of his academic manner was gone for good.

"I hope I have always been a man since growing to the size of one. I de-

cided to stop being a professor a little while before you came in here. And a friend? Well, about a half an hour ago, I as good as accepted the sort of job I've wanted all my life, a job starting me for Chile on Saturday."

Her visit had been a series of amazements. Now she added one more. Before he could utter another syllable, she cried out:

"So you'll give up your friend!"

And she wheeled, darted through the door, and slammed it behind her.

Dumfounded, Gage gaped. He had only intended to show her that he would make any sacrifice for Russ.

He followed to the door.

"Kyra!"

Gone. He ran outside. A taxi was rushing away. Bedford hailed another:

"See that car? Follow it. Catch up with it!"

They did follow—to the railroad station. But catch up they didn't. Their final spurt was stopped by a traffic jam. Gage got into the train shed just in time to see a westbound express pulling out—and to catch the merest glimpse of Kyra Carrington's angry face at a Pullman window.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE RING OF FIRE.

HE stood at the edge of what its Aleuts still call Kiuliuk (the Curving Beach.) Northward, leagues upon leagues of desert water, Bering Sea stretched away, twelve degrees, to the arctic circle, where Siberia's East Cape defied its waves. South lay the Pacific. Toward the nearest mainland, a chain of volcanic islands extended two hundred miles to the Alaskan peninsula; west, they ran four times that far until Attu rose beyond the one hundred and eighteenth meridian—inside the eastern hemisphere and yet also inside the uninterrupted territory of the United States.

Sardonically, he recalled his dream-destroying exchange of telegrams with the stout head of Edmunds, Folmon & Gerry:

J. T. Edmunds, Equitable Bldg., New York.
Sorry must decline job. Thanks. Can't go Chile. Going elsewhere. G. Bedford.

Gage Bedford, Univ., Syracuse, New York.
Where are you going? J. T. Edmunds.

J. T. Edmunds, Equitable Bldg., New York.
Going Fox, maybe Rat, Islands.
G. Bedford.

Gage Bedford, Univ., Syracuse, New York.
You mean you're going crazy.
J. T. Edmunds.

The nightmare of departure—resignation without explaining change of direction—drawing nearly all his small savings from the First Trust & Deposit Co.—packing one suit case—leaving the old rooms to the mercies of a janitor, who was to store what remained there.

The transcontinental trip—one long debate as to whether he was not the fool Edmunds thought him.

San Francisco—the search for, and final finding of, the Carringtons' apartment.

"I'm her mother."

A Russian woman, whose beauty, evidently once parallel to her daughter's, had been dimmed by reiterated disaster against which her American husband's death had left her defenseless. He told her who he was and what he wanted.

"But Kyra hasn't got back yet."

Perhaps she had stopped in Chicago. Mrs. Carrington thought there was some school friend in Chicago—Kyra was as wholly American by schooling as by nationality. The address? Forgotten. She would probably return soon. Tomorrow, a week, ten days. As to Russell, for Mrs. Carrington calamity impended in his case because for her, calamity always did impend—and was met with devastating fortitude.

"Well, I'm going to find him, dead or alive. You can tell Kyra I won't be back till I do!"

The attempts to dig up clews to Dean's intentions before his strange departure were fruitless. Office closed. Employees—there had been but a stenographer and an office boy—gone after other jobs—lost in the going.

Bedford bought an outfit, not for Chile. *He* went, too: one thousand five hundred and fourteen miles to Sitka; thence one thousand two hundred and fifty more miles. Past all the easternmost of those seventy Aleutian islands, the old geographers' "Ring of Fire," that bend far outward like so many stepping-stones toward Japan, some of them flung up from ocean's bottom within human memory. Past double-volcanoed Unimak, the sea lashing Mount Shishaldin's foundations, snow climbing to its smoky crater. Past Scotch Cap and around Akutan to splendid Dutch Harbor. Here Russell Dean must have come first if he meant to see the extremity of the archipelago.

Gage loosed the thongs of his boots, for he had dressed with the energy of a willing early riser. He unbuttoned his flannel shirt at the base of his strong throat, for the morning was warm.

"Who'd think this was the U. S.?" he marveled. "And who'd think *this* was me?"

At his feet his pack reposed. And there lay the vessel that had brought him and that ran here once a month from Seward. Inland, the treeless hillside was cloaked with flowers. Ducks circled overhead and dark-winged, white-tailed eagles shared a resting place on the domes and crosses of a church.

"Where do I go to find the authorities?"

As far as outward appearance went, the Aleut addressed might have been either man or woman—short, darkish, a greasy face, bright little black eyes peeping good-naturedly above the folds of a red blanket that draped a squat figure. But because the front hair was drawn up to a knot, Bedford rightly concluded she was of the sex that used to be called the weaker.

She shook her head.

"Onl' li'l' Eenglis'."

Gage tried again.

"Commissioner's office — commissioner?"

"Ah-h-h!" She got that. "Dep' com'."

"Well, the deputy commissioner, then. Where?"

"Me show."

She waddled ahead. One-story houses lined the water edge, and canoes were drawn up before them, guarded by ominous dogs.

"See!"

The Aleut's brown finger indicated something resembling a real building. Bedford gave her a quarter and went in. He nearly collided with an unmistakable American who was just coming out.

"Are you the deputy commissioner?"

This man was sandy, spectacled and smiling.

"Yes, sir. Just arrived? The only passenger? Glad to see you." He shook hands as if he really was glad. "Staying over? Hope you are!"

"I'm not sure. It depends on what you tell me. Have you got a minute to spare?"

"Sure—as many as you want. I was going out to your steamer, but that'll keep. Sit down. What can I do for you?"

Gage gave his name.

"I'm up here looking for somebody among these islands."

"Couldn't well lose him in the crowd. There are few enough people in this part of the world. Losing him in our wilds is another matter. Who is it?"

"His name is Russell Dean."

A slight shade clouded the serenity of the plump deputy commissioner.

"Hum," said he.

"Anything wrong?"

"No—oh, no. Only this Russell Dean seems to be an object of interest. We had a worried message about him from some lady in New York a while since. And then, about a week ago, there was a fellow who stopped off here from one of the last of the fishing boats, going north. He threw a fit about Dean."

Somebody else inquiring for Russell? Gage would come back to that.

"But what news can you give me of Dean himself? Any?"

"Yep. I saw him in the spring. I remember him because he spoke of his father, and I used to know the old man well. He came up three or four times; had some blue-fox-farm scheme or other that he was trying out, or going to try out, on Irbit-Ishim."

"Where's that?"

Oddly enough, the deputy commissioner used the phrase which Bedford had employed for the whole Aleutian group:

"It's the jumping-off place. For all it's got a double name, it's a two-by-four island. It lies away out near Attu at the edge of American jurisdiction."

"And Russell Dean? Was he going there?"

"Yep, and he did go." The official's annoyance rose. "I saw him start. I don't understand what all the fuss is about. His father fell overboard from a canoe near there last year and was drowned. We didn't get any word before here comes the son after him. So I told this Russell, and off he went for Irbit-Ishim. He was damned close-mouthed about the whole business; wouldn't answer any of my questions—just beat it in a little boat with a couple of Aleuts and one white guide. Naturally, though, he wanted to get any details he could, and to look after their interests out there, whatever they are. If he hasn't come back yet—well, it's some soon to expect him. As long as he turns up before winter sets in, he'll be all right."

Bedford hesitated. He wanted to tell this man of the torn note and its appeal. But had any one the right to tell that? Kyra had been sure she hadn't, and evidently her message purposely omitted it.

Did Gage, then, possess that right? "Damned close-mouthed—wouldn't answer any questions." More: another inquirer on the long trail "about a week ago." There *was* some mystery surrounding the Dean interests on Irbit-Ishim which Bedford might have to solve in the course of his quest, but which he must not—at least, while ignorant of its nature—place in the path of publicity. Indeed, it now struck him for the first time that, had his friend not feared publicity, he would have communicated directly with the authorities. Gage resolved to guard the secret.

"Just what was the news you got about Dean, Sr.?"

"Exactly what I told you. He was fishing and he was careless; he tumbled overboard and was drowned. There wasn't anything to investigate; that sort of thing happens all the time up here."

"Who brought the news?"

"Jim Cheadle. He'd gone out with the old man, and he went back with the son."

"Is he reliable?"

"Absolutely—half Russian, half Aleut. Cheadle's not his real name, nor Jim isn't, either. Like his brothers, Tom and Bill, like most all the natives, he's got names nobody could pronounce, so we lend 'em some we can say without jaw paralysis. But he knows the archipelago as well as he knows the

warts on his hands, and *we* all know Jim through and through—abso*lute*ly reliable."

Nothing there. Gage reverted to the other inquirer:

"About this man who was asking after Russell Dean?"

"What about him?"

"Who was he?"

"If he gave a name, I don't remember it. Why should I?"

"Is he still here?"

"Nope. He no sooner'd got what he could out o' me than he hired Tom Cheadle and beat it for Irbit-Ishim. That rock hasn't had so many visitors all at once since the day it popped out of the ocean."

"Did this fellow say what his interest was in the matter?"

"He didn't." The deputy commissioner became more and more peevish. "What's yours?"

"That of a friend of the missing man."

"He's not missing yet! If friends at home got after us whenever a guy came here and failed to write to them every two or three months, why, even allowing for the skimpy number that arrive, we'd be spending all the government's working year, cruising around for them."

That implication was plain enough. No help in *this* quarter. Yet Gage made one more effort.

"I should think," he said, "that 'cruising around' for a lost American citizen might be one of the duties of the government's boats in these waters."

"Then you'd be wrong. I don't admit your friend's lost, but supposing he is: do you realize how far it is from here to Irbit-Ishim? Between eight and nine hundred miles, and forty or fifty islands along the route that look like stepping-stones on the map, but—ain't. Those boats' duties are to patrol the sealing fields away up around the Pribilofs and prevent smuggling into the Aleutians. Some territory to cover!"

"The patrols must touch at Irbit-Ishim once in a while."

"They do—and one will, in the regular course of its job."

"When?"

"I don't know."

"Why can't you direct it to touch there now?"

"Because I'm not in Washington—because I'm not secretary of the department."

Gage picked up his pack and set his jaw: "All right."

"Now, Mr. Bedford," the official concluded, softening a bit as he gained his point, "I wish you'd stick around this joint a while. You'd add the pleasure of one more white man's company on a lonely dump. But if it's a case of your either wasting money by a private cruise to Irbit-Ishim, or else returning to civilization by the steamer that brought you here, my advice is for you to return."

Until he was out of the office, Bedford said nothing except, "Good-by." When, however, he stood in the squalid street, it was not toward his steamer that his dark eyes were directed. They were directed toward the western horizon to which, and beyond which, those wild islands point America's finger at the Orient. Little of the professor was left in him—but all of the man.

"Go back home?" he muttered. "Firstly, I don't want to, and secondly, if I did want to, I'd be a damned quitter—and I'm *not!*"

CHAPTER IV.

MR. WILLIAM CHEADLE.

THE day had grown still warmer. The Japanese current seemed working overtime in its endeavor to temper this climate. A strong smell of dried

cod and herring filled the air. Bedford felt of the money belt under his shirt.

"I've got enough cash," he thought, "even if it *is* my last cent."

Lumbering along came a stoop-shouldered fellow. He wore the native boots that are made of walrus-throat skin, but he turned toward Gage the mildly curious face of a dirty and tired white man.

"Do you know," Bedford asked, "where I can find Bill Cheadle?"

The passer-by consulted a pewter watch of the sort common among the Aleuts.

"He went over to St. John, the Theologian, yes'day." A vague gesture indicated the open sea where Bogoslov puffed as it has been puffing since that day in 1796 when the island of St. John was born. "But if he got back, he'll be doin' what I'm goin' to do."

"What's that?"

"Take my mid-mornin' bitters."

"Where?"

"If you buy, mister, I'll lead you to it."

Gage went along. They rounded the parish school.

"Is it as easy to get a drink up here down in San Francisco?"

A mirthless laugh prefaced the answer.

"I ain't seen Frisco in more'n twenty year, but you gotta remember Alaska started prohibition when the U. S. bought her. We know the ropes, an' this here island ain't a way station of the north Pacific whalin' fleet for nothin'." He smiled sourly. "They stop here every spring—jes' for water an' information 'bout the floes, you un'erstand."

He led on past the Methodist mission and stopped at the door of a low house with tightly shuttered windows. He gave two double knocks, then a single one.

"Who is it?" a demand came from inside.

"Cuyler."

"Anybody with you?"

"Jes' a frien'."

The door was opened by a shirt-sleeved dwarf—and closed and bolted behind them.

They were in a room lighted only by some swinging lamps. Tables stood about, and a few men sat at these. Across the room's farther end was a bar behind which the dwarf, whose shoulders barely topped it, placed himself.

"What'll it be, gentlemen?"

"You know me, 'Shorty,'" said Cuyler. To Bedford he said: "What's yours?"

Gage experienced some qualms.

"Is the whisky safe?"

"Safe's a bank," snarled Shorty.

"All right."

Two glasses of prewar size were generously filled with a brown liquid.

"I'd like a chaser," Gage suggested.

"You don't need it with this," Cuyler protested.

"An' we don't serve 'em," concluded Shorty.

"Drink," said Cuyler, "is the curse of the Aleutians. Here's to it."

The liquor wasn't quite poison.

"And now, about Cheadle?"

"'S have another first."

"*You* may. I'll wait a while."

Cuyler didn't mind. He wiped his lips with the back of a grimy hand. "Want a guide?"

"I want Bill Cheadle."

The dwarf rested his chin on the bar and considered Bedford intently. "He ain't come in yit."

Cuyler went persuasively on:

"If it's sea otters you're after, I c'n tell you more'n Bill—can't I, Shorty? An' if it's anythin' 'bout the cod fisheries over Shumagin way——"

"I'm going to Irbit-Ishim."

The dwarf drew back. Cuyler put down his glass.

"Don' you go there!" His bleary

eyes stared; his loose mouth twitched. "Isbit-Ishim's got a hex onto it."

"A what?"

Cuyler's voice sank to a whisper:

"That there island's guarded by Perun's ghost!"

Perun's ghost? The amused memory of Gage went back to his college course in mythology. Perun was surely the ancient Slavic god of thunder.

"How can a god have a ghost? Gods don't die."

"Perun did. My wife tol' me, an' she's as much Rooshin as Aleut. All the natives know 'bout it. Long ago in Rooshia, when every person at Kiev was baptized at the same time in the river there, why, they chucked Perun's statue into the water. The baptism killed him, 'cause he wouldn't take it. So his ghost crossed Siberie an' onto Irbit-Ishim. It wouldn't leave when we bought Alaska. It's killed every American that's gone there since."

Bedford looked at Shorty. That worthy was grinning, but shaking his bullet head.

"Some says it's just a yarn started by natives as wanted to keep away white hunters. Still, I've heard it ever since I been in these here islands, and that one sure ain't healthy fer folks o' our color."

Cuyler indicated a need of another drink to quiet his alarm for the greenhorn's safety.

"Why, jes' a while since, they was a man called Dean used to laugh 'bout Perun. Said *he* didn't believe in him, an' used to go out there frequent. But here, a season gone, Perun got him—they found his corpse on some rocks all tore to pieces."

"He was drowned," Gage disgustedly protested. "One of the Cheadles was with him and said so."

"Jim did. That was 'cause he knowed damn well the dep'ty commissioner wouldn't take the truth if he guv it."

"Then why didn't this Perun kill Jim?"

"His blood ain't American. It's us Americans Perun lays fer. He never wanted Alaska sold."

It was all too childish to continue. Gage asked:

"What was Dean's business out there?"

"Blue-fox farmin'!" Shorty snapped. His smile had vanished.

"That's what he *called* it," Cuyler leered; "but you gotta remember Irbit-Ishim's most over to Kamchatka—an' in Kamchatka, which it's Rooshin, them bolsheviks've built theirselves a distillery there as is doin' a exclusive export trade."

Bang-bang! Bang-bang!—bang!—another knock at the door. Shorty shuffled thither.

"Who is it?"

"Bill."

"Bill what?"

"Bill Cheadle!"

Gage turned. A streak of daylight, semidark again.

Shorty and the new arrival—as yet all shadow—exchanged some low-pitched sentences. Then the latter's voice rose loudly:

"Wants be his guide?"

The dwarf was seen to fling out protesting arms. "Not to——"

He wasn't further listened to. He was brushed aside. The customers at the tables half rose as Cheadle strode into the light before the bar.

Bedford had a glimpse of a squat, broad-faced man, swarthy, frowning. But a glimpse only—what followed immediately left no leisure for observation of personal details.

Cuyler, although half again Bill Cheadle's size, possessed no heart for discussion. His exit through that front door being barred by the enemy's advance, the drunkard leaped upon the bar itself, probably in panic endeavor

did not gain it, however. Amid a crash of glasses, a chorus of customers delighted at prospect of witnessing a physical encounter, unavailing protests from Shorty, a squeal from the victim and a roar from the attacker—amid all this, and before Gage well understood what was happening, an arm out of all proportion to Cheadle's size shot forward and collared Cuyler.

He was jerked back. He was heaved against the bar. An enormous, hairy fist was thrust under his quivering nose. Up at him glared eyes red with rage.

"You tak' dis gen'man Irbit-Ishim?"

"No!—*no!*—NO!" shrieked Cuyler

There appeared a slight hesitation on the part of the half-breed. He gave a single sidelong look at Gage, then went on:

"Know more 'bout otter hunt dan Bill?"

"No!—*no!*"

"An' how say Mist' Dean not drown?"

"Bill, I—I—*Bill!*"

It was no use. The smaller man picked up the larger as if he were a baby, as if he were a squalling, kicking baby, and carried him to the front door. Those inside saw Cuyler pitched, like a bundle of rags, into the street.

Bill Cheadle closed and bolted the door. He returned to the bar. He did not even breathe heavily as he put out to Bedford in amity that hairy hand which had so lately been the fist threatening Cuyler:

"Now we two talk." Those eyes—they were almost red even in calm—studied Gage's athletic form from feet to head. "We two *men*," the half-breed concluded.

CHAPTER V.

THE BARGAIN.

THE fun was over. Cheated out of seeing a real fight, the other customers had returned to their tables in the low-ceilinged room. Shorty was thankful that no such row had happened as might bring undue attention to his illicit business. Again he stood behind his bar.

"I'll buy," said Gage.

Bill Cheadle looked the part of the half-breed Aleut that the deputy commissioner had called him. Although he was not much over five feet six in height, his excessively broad shoulders and long arms, his deep chest and thick flanks, gave the quick impression of unusual strength. He wore a blue flannel shirt and blue overalls, which were tucked into the inevitable sealskin boots.

"T'anks," said he.

His hat had fallen off, the sole apparent effect of the struggle—if struggle it might be called—and disclosed a large head covered with coarse, black hair, close cropped in front above a slightly retreating forehead. His nose was flat, but he had a wide grin, and it showed good teeth. All this, Bedford knew, was Aleut enough, yet some of it might be Tartar, if not pure Russian, and under it there was a distinct hint of Asiatic blood.

"I'm glad you weren't too hard on our friend Cuyler," Gage began. "He really didn't mean——"

Cheadle grunted. "Do heem heap good. Cuyler *cultus*—how you say 'wort'less?' Heem squaw man; married Aleut girl an' live on her work."

"He seemed to think he hunted otters."

"Otters spoil' long 'go. When my pappy boy, down Belkofski way, t'ousan' dol' each pelt. Now all finish'. Oh, Cuyler right 'nough—only *cultus*. Me no stan' have my frien' Mist' Dean called rum smuggler."

"What *was* Mr. Dean's business?"

Cheadle looked Gage straight in the eye. "Blue fox."

He was too good at it—it was patently a lie. Well, if the half-breed had been a friend to the dead man, who to seek some means of rear escape. He

would blame such deception now? Bedford honored it.

"How was he killed?"

"Fishin'—fall in water—drown."

"This talk about a curse on that island——"

"Ha! Dat all low-down native stuff—natives an' squaw man." The fact that one of Cheadle's recent ancestors must have belonged to the scorned class did not affect his descendant; the Aleutian creoles of the Russian strain "marry white," as they describe it, and they are the islands' aristocracy. "Perun's ghost! Me know. Heem jus' an ole walrus—fierce, but jus' walrus. Some time me go Irbit-Ishim again; den me *keel* Perun's ghost."

"That," said Gage, "is what I want to talk to you about. I came here to get you to take me to Irbit-Ishim."

Cheadle looked him over again out of the obliquely set eyes. "Who sent?"

"The deputy commissioner mentioned you. Have another drink?"

"No, t'anks." Cheadle caressed his square chin. "Why you want go dere?"

Bedford told as much as he had told the resident authority, and no more. Rather as that authority had responded, Cheadle responded now:

"Boy all right. My brudder, Jim, knows how take care heem."

"Well, besides"—Gage grew restless under these objections—"there's somebody else who's gone ahead of me."

"Den you no have go."

"Yes, I do. It may be a friend, but it might be an enemy."

"You"—Cheadle's eyes widened—"you no know who heem is?"

"I do not. Who was it? Your other brother——"

"Me no see heem. Me at Unalaska den. But my odder brudder good guide, too, an' heem good frien' to ole Mist' Dean as was drown'. No harm any Dean when my two brudders out dere."

Shorty had been summoned to a greasy table in his professional capacity. Cheadle and Bedford stood alone at the bar. Gage pulled his shoulders to their full height and set his jaw.

"Still I'm going."

"Why?"

"Let's say it's because I'm this far on my way already. When I start anything, I generally go through with it."

Perplexity showed on the round face of the squat Bill Cheadle.

"But why you *start* it?"

Queer, the way everybody opposed this voyage. Queer and pestering. Everybody seemed to offer some excuse, little or big, to dissuade him. Bedford's temper got the better of him.

"Firstly, for the reasons I gave you. Secondly, because I've grounds for believing that my friend's in trouble or danger, or has been."

"Groun'?" Cheadle's face darkened. "What groun' you got?"

"That's my own affair."

"My two brudders——"

"They may be in trouble, too—or the first of 'em. Listen to me." Gage shook a determined finger. *"I'm going!* If you won't take me, I'll find somebody who will—and I pay well. Now, then, make up your mind. Shall it be you or somebody else?"

Even the half Aleut has a pleasant smile. Cheadle, although he frowned for an instant, smiled at last, disarmingly. He had come to a decision.

"Oh, ver' well. Me jus' want save you rough trip. If you goin' anyhow, me tak' de money. How much you pay?"

CHAPTER VI.

STRANGE WATERS.

BEDFORD—a sun-bronzed, sea-salted Bedford now—leaned against the rail amidships. That characteristic wrinkle cut a deeper furrow between his dark eyes. As it had long been doing—as it had been doing ever since this voyage began—the blood at his temple

pulsed out a single command, forever reiterated:

"Hurry! hurry!"

Slim, keen—something between a cutter and a sloop was this boat of Bill's, the *Red Sickle*. She should have made wonderful time in favorable circumstances. Moreover, Bill had specially fitted her with racing canvas, because, as he frankly declared, their adventure's most essential factor must be a speed that would insure return, before the onrush of these latitudes' early winter made return difficult if not impossible.

And yet one event after another, all of them unforeseen, slowed progress. Fogs were plentiful, and calms, of course, came with them. Then, in clear weather, a series of obscure accidents necessitated putting in at a corresponding series of obscure and almost uninhabited islets.

On each of these, Gage asked the same questions of their greasy Aleuts, and received much the same answers, generally through Bill as interpreter, for the majority of those natives spoke Russian and their own dialect, and Bedford knew neither.

"Have you seen a white man, tall, naturally blond——" Russell Dean's detailed description followed.

Almost always the reply was a head-shaken negative. Russ and his guide seemed to have been making a forced march, they said. Occasionally, however, they had paused perforce for food or water. Then:

"When was it?"

"Long ago."

"How long?"

"The month before the month that brings the first flowers."

That meant May—indeed "long ago."

"What was his direction?"

"Toward the sunset."

At least, the seekers were not missing him on his voyage back—supposing he would ever take one. He had, to follow this route, Bill said.

"And another white, who was looking for that first white?"

"No."

"On we go, Bill."

But Bill began to grumble, a low, guttural grumble that belied his now only fitful disarming words. Or was it impending truth that soon the *Red Sickle* ought herself to turn eastward?

"Dat winter catch us."

"What! You contracted to take me to Irbit-Ishim."

"Too many bad lucks."

"A contract's a contract. Go ahead."

And ahead they would go, under protest. Less fog, but more accidents. They were away past the Fox and Rat Islands of Bedford's long-ago telegram to Edmunds. Gage wished he understood more about shipping and less about rowing; he began to think that, for all his strength and boisterous scorn of Perun's ghost, Bill believed in it and somehow even feared it. More accidents, more islets, too.

One of these volcanic excrescences was, at this clear hour of the afternoon, slipping off from the *Red Sickle's* starboard quarter, as like as a twin brother to any of its fellows—by day seen treeless, but gay with green grass and flowering shrubs; by night often its single mountain a glowing torch. Only a sole difference: the farther the voyagers voyaged west toward the Far East, the more scanty became the scanty population, the lower it sank in the scale of life.

Since the famine of '97, the commercial company had abandoned its outlying trading posts. Akutan, Sannok and Morjovia were left to their fate; Wosnessenski, Belkofski and Chernofski followed, then Kashega, Makushin and Bjorka. Thereafter, the natives diminished and declined. No more even semicivilized shacks for houses; the

mission chapels deserted except for periodic visits, long separated, by priests too few to take each a separate charge. Supporting themselves by fishing during the brief summers, the Aleuts hibernated in sod huts for the remainder of the year—dirty creatures and oily, their amusements petty gambling and large debauches on alcohol made or smuggled by methods known outside this forgotten world to none save the Recording Angel.

"If Irbit-Ishim's the jumping-off place," Gage wondered, "what places are these?"

Upon him, too, the prevailing fog and fine rain had told—the diet of salt salmon, or *ukl*, varied only by such fresh fish as were caught or bargained for in tiny ports. The season would soon shut in, all too soon. Although the warm months are free of bergs because Bering Strait stops them, in winter ice floes circumvent navigation. Bill growled more and more loudly; the crew of six Aleuts began to show signs of discontent.

Cheadle came up to Gage.

"Troub', Mist' Bedfor'."

"What is it now?"

"This night we get Chepany-Ber."

"What's that?"

"Island."

Gage laughed outright. "You can hardly object to another island more or less."

"Mist' Bedfor'"—Cheadle's brows closed together above his flat nose—"you mak' me go on when me no want. So we go on—to now. But now Chepany-Ber' nex' island—las' island 'fore Irbit-Ishim." He hesitated for barely a fifth of a second before adding: "Las' 'cep' one."

Said Gage: "I call that good news, not more trouble."

"Nex' one two-t'ree days from Chepany-Ber; Irbit-Ishim four days from dat. Like tol' you, Mist' Bedfor', winter come queek here—to-day *know* winter come soon."

"Nonsense!" Gage regarded the momentarily blue sky, the sun ablaze, the sparkling water churned to white in the *Red Sickle's* wake. "You're crazy, man."

"Me know. Me smell heem."

"Smell the winter?"

For reply, Bill led him to the stern. There was a brisk wind blowing, and their immediate course was southwest. The half-breed tilted his square chin high; his nostrils dilated rapidly, then closed.

"Do like dat. Empty out all your win' first, den do like dat."

Bedford obeyed.

"Smell heem? You smell heem? Yes?"

Whether born of fact or manufactured by suggestion, an odor did seem to enter Gage's sniffing nose. It was faint, and he couldn't classify it—something distant and a little like that given off by damp wool suddenly placed in the sun.

"Well?" he inquired.

"Snow—heem snow," said Bill.

"I don't believe it." Bedford meant that he didn't want to believe.

"Me know."

"Then I don't give a whoop, anyhow. Do you expect me to turn back when I'm this near the trail's end?"

"Mist' Bedfor', my boat, she——"

Gage seized one of those mighty shoulders.

"She's not your boat until you've fulfilled your contract with me, for I paid for that contract. She's mine."

The Russo-Aleut face darkened, his mouth grew tight. Powerful as he was, this product of the northern isles could have beaten him in ordinary fight, and Bedford knew it; but he was also aware of what he considered the superior power of his civilization. He didn't believe it would come to fighting.

Oddly enough, it didn't. Bill Cheadle shook away the detaining hand as if it were a puppy's paw, yet he did not offer retaliation. Instead, he turned and walked forward. One of the Aleut crew was there engaged in coiling a rope. Bill did not appear to consider the job seamanlike. He struck the native a blow that sent him rolling across the deck.

"Taking it out on the dog," said Gage.

Bill gave orders. The club topsail and balloon jib were set to aid mainsail and spinnaker. Evidently, the captain was going to get to Chepany-Ber with all speed.

The other island dropped from view, and the *Red Sickle* ran before the wind across an empty sea. Empty the sea remained until just before the sunset fog began.

Bedford had walked to the bows, Bill no more than nodding to him as he passed, and there waited. When they put about to due west, he saw a dot on the horizon.

"Chepany-Ber?" he asked, over his shoulder.

Cheadle gave no answer; perhaps he was too busy directing the helmsman. That Aleut, however, shouted an affirmative: *"Da!"*

Slowly the dot enlarged. It showed itself as an island that was a single hill, with a small beach on the hither side, jutting out of the ocean.

Chepany-Ber, the next isle but one before Irbit-Ishim.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT THE NIGHT COULD NOT HIDE.

THEY were to stop for the night here. The necessary rounding of Chepany-Ber's farther side was a feat, Bill vouchsafed, which even he didn't care to attempt without some rest after a full day's work, and Gage, although his pulses were hammering out harder than ever that command to hurry, thought it wise not to press his now unwilling guide too hard.

"But we've got to get on our way first thing in the morning."

Bill nodded sullenly.

Rough breakers kept the *Red Sickle* off, yet they proved no hindrance to the Aleut who, with his wife, Bill said, were the islet's sole inhabitants. This "master of all he surveyed" came bounding out to them, up one watery hill and down its neighbor, aboard a typical example of those tight skin canoes which our westernmost citizens still prefer to any other craft.

"He's a wonder!" Bedford's admiration, as that of a former stroke car, was spontaneous and sincere.

"Anybody learn dat." It was commonplace to Bill, himself an adept in the art. "'Pon time, my pappy an' udder man, dey tak' a *bidarka,* nineteen foot long over all, all way Kadiska to Frisco, six'een hun'red mile, hun'red-five days."

The canoe came alongside. With any less skillful management, it would have been instantly bashed to shreds against the *Red Sickle's* side. Gage gazed down at a short head of excessive breadth. Then there was turned up a face that, despite its wide-mouthed welcome, showed scarcely pacific; it had been rendered forever fierce by twin holes bored through the cheeks, into which were placed the long hairs from seals' muzzles.

"Looks a bit hard boiled."

"Woman," Bill protested. "Heem like woman. Me know heem well."

"Hello!" shouted Bedford.

The artificially bewhispered Aleut waved a dark hand, and replied:

"'Lo!"

"Dat's all hees Eenglis'," Bill explained. "Rest hees talk Aleut an' li'l' Russian."

Somehow, Gage and his guide were lowered into the dancing *bidarka.* Somehow, they correctly greeted its owner without upsetting it. Somehow, leaving their crew to care for the *Red Sickle,* they were brought, across foaming summits of water, safely ashore.

The hut that stood there, about fifty feet above high tide and nestling against the hill base, was a slight improvement on most that the voyagers had lately seen. It was low and greasy and smoky, but it was built of wood shipped hither at some earlier day in the history of the commercial company, and—a token of vast distinction—must have contained at least three rooms. Into the darkened first of these Bedford and Bill were shown.

There was a rude table and a few chairs. There was a door to the right. An open fire fed a recalcitrant chimney. From blackened rafters hung fox, mink and marten skins, tails down. An Aleut woman, clothed and booted like a man, bowed, served supper on tin plates, bowed again, and disappeared.

"Who's that?" asked Gage.

"Woman," said Bill. "Hees woman."

"Where's she going?"

"Bed."

"Isn't she going to have some supper with us?"

"No."

"She's had hers already?"

"Not eat same room strange white man. Mebbe not eat 't all. Me not know."

Nor care either—apparently. Gage left that subject of tribal taboos. "What's our friend's name?"

"Léon Bclschakoff."

"Never mind the last part of it. Ask him if he's seen anything of young Dean."

The familiar queries were put, but to no purpose. Russell hadn't stopped here, hadn't been known by the dour-faced Léon.

"Sure he doesn't forget?"

"He couldn't forget see' white man. Not gen'ly see one in t'ree year'."

Léon barked a phrase; his seal whiskers flickered; he slammed the table.

"He swear not see young Mist' Dean."

"Why the violence? No use getting riled."

"Aleuts no like not be believ'. But Léon say like I do. Young Mist' Dean can't get in danger: my brudder 'long."

"Brudder" had been along with Dean, Sr., and the latter had drowned. No use, though, to urge this. What about the other seeker, the mysterious seeker who had preceded Bedford?

Bill jabbered to Léon. The Aleut looked at first puzzled. Then he turned to Gage and rattled off a long sentence, slapping the table again.

"He say," explained Bill, with genially noncommittal face, "he not see nobody else."

Their host executed a sweeping gesture toward the food and emitted more guttural sounds.

"Now he say, 'Let's begin.'"

They sat down, and Bedford noticed that, crabbed as ever, Léon, unlike most Aleuts that Gage had observed, neglected to make, before eating, the sign of the cross in the Eastern and primitive fashion—right to left. In fact, he did not make any invocation, but fell to immediately, filling his wide mouth to its utmost capacity and straightway bolting its contents.

That was the usual meal of the islands—the meal partly provided by the surrounding waters, but more by rare and adventurous canoe trips far to the east, the meal repeated thrice daily, and every day in the year. An evil mixture. You had to be well accustomed to it, or very hungry, before you could successfully stomach it. There was fish, and coarse bread on which heavy layers of condensed milk

had been poured; there was weak coffee, oversweetened and further weakened by more condensed milk; there was bread again, saturated with molasses. All these dishes were eaten together.

Gage recalled something that Kyra Carrington had said, so far away there in his academic study where the summer flies had hotly buzzed—so long ago, it seemed, in time. Something about one of the outermost islands before Irbit-Ishim was reached. At a venture he inquired:

"Is Léon the only name this fellow has?"

"Told you—Belschakoff."

"And *I* told *you* to let that one alone. I mean any other Christian name?"

"Aleuts have only one li'l' name. Why you ask?"

"I've heard about a place around here where there was an Aleut that was a friend of old Mr. Dean's—at least, I understood he was a friend. His name was some saint's name that we don't often hear. Wait a minute; I've got it—Panteleimon."

Bill bent forward across the table. "Where you hear dat?"

"Oh, back East."

Bedford's reluctance to give more details was evident. Bill spoke to Léon. That native frowned, shook his head and spluttered into his coffee.

"He say Panteleimon used be here. Not now. Heem gone away."

"Where is he?"

"Don' know. Heem dead."

"Drowned, I'll bet—death due to the prevailing local malady. It's a system. Well"—Gage considered the scowling Léon—"this merry person doesn't seem so sorry about it as he does angry."

"He say they not like each udder."

Into big, tin cups, Léon poured full portions of the Aleutians' homemade liquor—*hoochinos*. Since his first encounter therewith, Bedford had avoided letting any of the bitter, burning stuff get inside of him. He was still academic enough to wonder whether its name were not the origin of his more effete countryside's "hooch," but he could not find that out by drinking it.

"None for me, thanks," he said.

Bill interpreted. "Den dere will be more for us," said he pleasantly.

Gage regretted that and perhaps showed his regret as the other two gravely drank his health. He did not want the captain of the *Red Sickle* to start the next day's voyage with a hangover.

"I think I'll turn in early. And I think it wouldn't hurt you to do the same."

Bill took another sip of *hoochinos*. "Me got t'ings talk 'bout to dis man. Not see heem for long time. Good night."

Resignation was imperative.

"All right; but go easy with that stuff. Ask our little Léon to show me where I'm to bunk."

Léon ushered Bedford through the inner door. It opened on a tiny room, close and unsavory, with one small window. Some modicum of light was provided by a wick that floated in a dish of grease standing on the floor, and this revealed the only furnishings—a pile of furs in a corner—the bed.

Gage went to the window, carefully closed and shuttered; he opened it. The Aleut glowered and made a sound of amazement and disapproval combined.

"Don't you worry," said Bedford. "I won't take cold. But I'd a lot rather take cold than smother to death."

He looked again about him. Here, ahead, was another door, apparently opening into another room. Unthinkingly, he stepped toward it.

Léon cried out. Both his hands seized his guest's shoulders.

"Your wife's?" asked Bedford. "Well, don't worry." He always spoke

to these natives as if they could understand him. "I only wanted to see if it was locked."

He tried the thing. It was bolted on the other side.

The Aleut jabbered excitedly. He pointed at the door; he wagged his head from side to side, its false whiskers moving ominously.

"Sure. I understand," Gage assured him, with a smile. "I shan't disturb the lady."

Léon returned to the main room, leaving Gage alone.

"Might have said good night, anyhow."

He took off his jacket and boots, but sat on the pile of fur for some moments before thinking of extinguishing that odorous lamp. He was not a man sensitive to subtle impressions, but he felt something sinister about this room.

There was nothing subtle in its staleness, anyhow—and that was enough to sicken any civilized creature. The fresh air of the Aleutian night seemed hardly able to force an entrance, so thick was the interior atmosphere. The window had probably never been opened before; months had evidently passed since anybody slept here. Gage coughed and put out his head, gasping.

Still, these physical conditions were not primarily the cause of his oppression; about that he felt sure. Léon was unlike any native he had yet encountered, not only in his lack of the ordinary religious devotion, but in sullenness and vehemence, too. That denial of Russell's ever having been here, for instance. Why hammer the table over it?

The night was not silent—night never is on those islands. The breakers pounded against the beach with the noise of thunder. Perhaps this was why Gage couldn't hear any voice from the two men who must be talking in the common room. That dampness to which Bill had called attention, and upon the significance of which he had put such stress, was still noticeable.

"Did it really mean snow?

And if it did?

Bedford drew back. He must get his sleep, no matter how stale this room might be. He flung back the upper piece of fur and reached for the lamp. His cheeks were puffed to blow it out when a movement of his feet drove something out of the depths of the bed and sent it clattering across the floor.

Gage held the lamp in that direction. A bit of gilt caught the dim rays—the gilt of a miniature frame. He picked up the object and brought it close to his immediately marveling eyes.

"Good Lord!"

But he spoke softly. Instinctively, he had adopted caution. For there could be no mistake about what his shaking fingers inclosed, what his glance was riveted upon. It was a likeness of the wistful face, honest, yet with a hint of mysticism, which had been shown in the picture that hung in his Syracuse study. It was, beyond all shadow of doubt, that miniature likeness of Kyra Carrington which had once belonged to Russell Dean.

CHAPTER VIII.

RASH TRIUMPH.

IT was true. Pictures of Kyra Carrington weren't scattered indiscriminately over the world's wilds—and here was a unique picture of her. Through his latter college days, Russ had carried this trinket with him wherever he went. Although he then laughingly pretended that his attachment to it was only a manifestation of undergraduate sentimentality toward the model for an ancient painting, his roommate knew the concrete object always reposed in Dean's inner breast pocket. And, since, Bedford had learned more—learned the relation in which his friend stood to

Kyra. This miniature's presence here proved that its owner had been in Léon's hut, or near it, notwithstanding Léon's vehement denial. Perhaps he was here now.

Gage shook off the instinctive caution that had urged him to quiet. If the Aleut possessed any guilty knowledge, it must be forced from him, and the sooner the better. Bedford flung wide the common-room door.

"Léon!"

The lamp in that apartment had burned itself out; the twilight of the northern night could not penetrate the fastened windows. But enough light issued from the dying fire on the hearth to show a sordid scene. Bill faced the intruder, open-mouthed. Under the suspended pelts, Léon's figure sprawled before the table and half across it; his chair was pushed far back, his face was buried between outstretched arms. He did not answer; for a moment neither did Bill, who placed a hand on the hunched shoulders of the Aleut. There was no sound except the breakers' endless roar that forced passage through the wooden shutters.

Then Gage spoke again. "Léon!"

Bill kept his hand where he had placed it. "What's matter?" His deep-sunken eyes blinked.

"I've got to talk to this fellow."

"You forget, Mist' Bedfor'; he have got no Eenglis'."

"I don't forget. You're going to translate."

Bill hung his head.

"Mist' Bedfor', me hate tell you, but you say go slow drink and me do—only Léon he go fast. Fast as paddle over breakers. He go all way. Heem drunk."

"We'll see about that!"

Gage advanced. He shook the lax form—to no purpose. He turned up the oily face, with its bristling whiskers. The lids were closed; from the loose mouth mounted the fumes of alcohol.

"Dat no use," said Bill, and he repeated his first question: "What's matter? Mebbe me help."

Perhaps he could help—Léon evidently couldn't. Bedford walked to the hearth and nodded to Bill to follow.

"See this?"

Under what light there was, he extended the miniature in an open palm. Bill bent over it until his flat nose almost touched the surface.

A strange place for that picture—this room in a hut on a lonely island, the atmosphere of drink, the skins of wild beasts, that table bearing empty tin cups and the torso of a savage, the bronzed man whom nobody would have guessed to be a recent teacher of geology to students at an Eastern university, the half-breed guide, the girl's image.

The pair of adventurers looked at her likeness, with sharply contrasting expressions. Bill's was sheer puzzlement; Gage's was anger directed against Léon's lie. Then the voyagers looked at each other.

"Me see," said Bill, as much interested in the frame as in the miniature itself.

"Well?"

"Who is?"

"No matter who. I found it in the furs in my room here."

The guide extended hairy claws. "Den Léon's. Give Léon when wake up."

"That's just the point." Bedford pocketed the picture. "It *isn't* Léon's."

"Dink not?"

"I know it."

A measure of slow comprehension visibly dawned on the semi-Oriental ace, but Bill merely inquired: "Den whose is?"

"It is the property," Gage answered with deliberation, "of Mr. Russell Dean."

"Dink so?"

"I know that, too."

Bill's features resumed complete stolidity.

"Léon say he no' acquaint' young Mist' Dean, Mist' Bedfor'—never see heem."

"He's a liar!"

"Hush, Mist' Bedfor'!" The half-breed glanced at their still motionless host. "He might hear. Den he damn mad."

"I wish he would hear—and understand."

"Oh, no, Mist' Bedfor'. Me sure. Mebbe Léon Léonovitch drink li'l' some time—all island men drink li'l' some time; but heem no liar. Many year me know Léon ve'y well."

"Then as soon as he sobers up, he's got to explain how that thing got here without my friend's bringing it. We'll give him a sea bath to get the liquor out of him pretty soon; it may wash the upper layer of grease off his face at the same time; but while he's sleeping away the top gallon of his *hoochinos,* I'm going to search this hut. I'll go through the whole island with a fine-tooth comb if I have to, only first I want to see what's in that room on the other side of mine."

Bill was no longer imperturbable. His face was puckered, his head wagged. As if Gage's decision launched a rashness that startled him out of his memory of English, he uttered a full sentence of exclamation in the Aleut dialect.

"What do you say?" Bedford demanded.

"Me—me say"—Bill partially recovered—"dese far-island men no let strangers even look in woman's room. Kill you—kill selves—if strangers do."

"You told me *this* island man was a regular woman, himself. Anyhow, he's too drunk to interfere, and even if he wasn't——"

There came a rush from behind them. They wheeled in time to see the drunkard lurching into the scant cell which had been assigned to Gage.

"Hi, there!"

Bedford ran after the Aleut, and Bill followed Bedford.

"Careful, Mist'——"

Bill's warning was interrupted. The door slammed in Gage's raging face. A bolt shot home.

Bedford hammered on the panels.

"Open up! Yell to him to open up, Bill. Tell him if he doesn't, I'll break the thing down."

"Mist' Bedfor', careful!"

"Tell him!"

The guide pressed to the door and called something in Aleut. He received no response.

"All right," said Gage. "Stand aside, Bill."

"Let me do it."

"I won't. *Get* away!"

Bill drew back, resignedly. Bill grabbed the knob and put his high, but slim, shoulder to the spot, behind which the already curving boards indicated the bolt's location. Twice he lunged, without effect. The third attack produced a splintering sound. At the fourth, the fastening ripped loose. The door shot open, and Gage tumbled tumbled after it.

"Heem not here!"

Bedford, picking himself up, saw Bill staring across an empty room at its open window.

"The other door!" shouted Gage—and went for it.

Also bolted. Bedford charged it like a bull, but it was either better built or better secured than its predecessor; it resisted mightily, and Gage's shoulder was soon a mass of bruises. With all the calm of the Orient, Bill waited until his companion drew back, panting.

"Dis time you let me do. *Da.*"

He shuffled up to within a yard of the portal. He drew back his hairy right fist that looked like a poised sledge hammer. Like a sledge hammer, too, it was shot forward, and like paper the panel broke before it. Bill reached through the hole he had made, released the bolt, stepped off and bowed gravely for Gage to enter.

It was a room somewhat larger than that which Bedford had just left—a table, two or three heaps of furs—and nothing else.

"I'll be damned if I can make this out!"

But, yes, there *was* something else, after all. There was a third door.

Gage tore at its knob. The door flew to him. It opened on the hillside.

Flight? Flight, it had been well said, was confession. Bedford whipped out his army automatic, bought in San Francisco. From somewhere above him, he heard—or thought he heard—a crackling of twigs. Toward that he stormed upward. But he did not forget the *bidarkas*.

"You beat it to the beach!" he called to Bill. "Scuttle those canoes. See if any's got away!"

Gage, bent nearly double, strained toward the summit. Shrubs whipped at his cheeks as if they were conscious things resenting this alien's trespass—allied with Léon in defense against it. A rounded bit of lava rolled under Bedford's weight. He fell prone, but recovered and hurried forward.

Two things seemed clear: the Aleut had something to conceal and had deceived his visitors. He could not have been so drunk—or, at least, as drunk as he pretended to be. He had taken alarm at Gage's sudden entrance into the common room, or at something that Bill might have let fall in talk a little earlier. Perhaps Léon understood more English than he had been credited with understanding. Perhaps that involuntary exclamation made in the native dialect by Bill when Gage announced his intended search—perhaps that had betrayed the danger. Anyhow, the fat was in the fire at last.

Upward! Flowers, crushed underfoot, sent their perfume into Bedford's dilated nostrils. The seeker's face was scratched in a score of places. His bruised shoulder ached; he had wrenched his ankle when that stone tripped him. Forgetting his pain, he plunged ahead.

About him the underbrush snapped. From below rose the surf's thunder. Then, crashing through these noises, issued a third—a fourth: two shots from a revolver.

He stopped short. Those reports originated below his present eminence, not above it; of that he was certain. He turned. This was no ambush laid for him by a canny enemy; the shots came from the direction of the shore, which was now far away.

"Mist' Bedfor'!"

Bill's voice, that—faint from distance, or distress, but surely Bill's. Gage began to run back the way he had come.

"Mist' Bedfor'!"

The descent appeared impossibly longer than the climb had been. Twice more Gage fell, lightly now, but sliding headlong into tangled brushwood.

"Mist' Bedfor'!"

Nearer now. Gage's loping run became a series of jumps. Ankle and shoulder were alike forgotten in his hurry.

There was the rambling hut, and there the open door. He had arrived at last, breathless, panting, alert; but nobody was in sight.

Again his name was called. From the front? That was it! He made another, and last, spurt, rounding this mysterious dwelling.

Not twenty yards distant from its front door, Bill was crouching. He

crouched over two fallen figures, distinct in the late summer light—the figure of Léon, and the figure of Léon's wife. Both were dead, and in the fist of the former was clutched a revolver. A grim, startling tragedy.

The guide resettled himself into his heritage of Eastern calm:

"Same way me tell you, Mist' Bedfor', dese far-island men no let strangers go see woman's room 't'out trouble. Léon too beeg coward to fight; like I say, he shoot hees woman, den he shoot self. *Da!*"

CHAPTER IX.

THE OTHER SEEKER.

THE *Red Sickle* raced on westward, a favorable breeze astern. The wind bore that scent which Bill dreaded now, but the skies were clear again, and the water gayly white and blue. The fatal island of Chepany-Ber lay ten miles off the starboard quarter, as happy under its radiant flowers as if its sole tenants had not been buried in a common grave twenty-four hours ago.

And their secret, whatever its nature, was buried with them. A thorough search of hut and hill had revealed exactly nothing at all. Bedford worked with the zeal of a loyal friend indoors—outside, with the attention gained in his field work as a geologist. Bill gave ready aid. It availed them nothing; they found no further trace of any third person's occupancy, not even another grave, and Gage was forced at last to surrender. He ordered the voyage resumed.

Bill proved now the more philosophical of the two. It might be that the tragedy had reawakened a temporarily dormant Asiatic fatalism.

"Snow sure," he said; "but if you tell to, Mist' Bedfor', we go."

Gage's soul was not at ease, however. By disregarding, after fair warning, an outlandish Aleut taboo, he had driven, so Bill stoically explained, those natives to their deaths. There was just a chance that they guarded no sinister secret—that the miniature had been dropped by Russell when stopping at some uninhabited neighboring island to the west, and that, long after his departure, Léon had picked it up during one of his *bidarka* visits there, ignorant, to be sure, of its significance. Just a chance, to be sure, yet enough to increase the horror of what had happened.

There was little to do aboard. Bill, grown garrulous in an endeavor to lift his employer's gloom and dissipate the dark frown that hovered between his brows, stood beside Bedford and chattered, in his guttural apology for English, of the older Alaskan days of which his "pappy" had told him. He spoke of Dick Willoughby of Virginia, that famous first American pioneer on the mainland, who, back in the middle of the nineteenth century, ranged those shores from the frontier to Bering Strait—of the days when an Aleut was content to gain one otter skin in a twelvemonth, doing his hunting with a spear—of the almost waste-ruined Nushagak salmon fisheries at Bristol Bay—of the great gold rush of the late '90s and the hardships of the Yukon Trail.

"Bill," Gage interrupted, with a query put for the twentieth time during the recent past, "do you think I was to blame for—for what that Aleut did?"

The half-breed puckered his wide mouth.

"Dat's over. No good worry. You go woman room; Aleut woman room sacred her an' her man; Léon 'fraid kill you, so kill woman—kill self. Dead. No good worry."

"I wouldn't if I thought he was any way mixed up in trouble coming to Mr.

Russell Dean. But he mightn't have been."

"Like said, Léon no liar. Still, over now."

"I wish I could be sure."

Bill shrugged. Discussion of this subject plainly annoyed him, if only because he considered it ought to be regarded as permanently closed. Besides, he hadn't the white man's introspective consience. He sauntered stolidly away.

It was then that the amazing thing happened. Gage, two thirds preoccupied by his own brooding, nevertheless noted what appeared to be a heap of tarpaulins a few paces abaft. These hadn't been here before the *Red Sickle's* arrival at Léon's island, but Bedford remembered seeing them as soon as he came aboard this morning. There was something odd about their shape. With the toe of a boot, he prodded the heap.

The heap moved. It spoke:

"We were coming out, anyway."

A flap of canvas was lifted. Two persons rose and stood upright on the pitching deck.

"What in the——"

The one, who made off hurriedly after Bill, was—save for a somewhat greater height and a ragged scar of sickly white across the left cheek—Bill's double: flat nose, cavernous eyes, square chin. For him, however, Gage had small regard. He could not have much because, although it wore boots and knickerbockers, a man's flannel shirt and a broad-brimmed felt hat of masculine form, the second apparition possessed the slim figure, the clear complexion, the brilliantly Russian-blue eyes depicted in that miniature once in Dean's breast pocket, now in Bedford's.

"Hello!"

She smiled faintly. As if for the first time realizing her boyish garb, she suddenly wore it with a winning awkwardness.

"Miss Carrington? By all that is—well, I'll——"

"'Kyra.' You know, it was to be 'Kyra.'" She gave him her hands.

He could scarcely take them.

"But up here? In this boat? What——" He choked on a dozen amazed questions that jostled one another in their rush for utterance.

"You see," she said, "I thought you weren't going after Russ—so I had to go myself."

Far more than the boat's natural movement could account for, the watery horizon heaved.

"I *was* going. All along I meant to. You misunderstood."

"I know it now. As soon as *your Cheadle* told me who his employer was, I understood that I'd misunderstood."

Bedford stared and stared, and still found it well nigh impossible to accept the assertion of his sight.

"*I* don't understand anything!" So this was that shadowy other seeker, mention of whom had been so disturbing! "The deputy commissioner back there told me there was somebody ahead of me, but he didn't say it was a woman."

"It wasn't. I had a Frisco detective along with me—I managed to scrape together enough money for that—and he did all the interviewing. He even hired *my* Cheadle brother, and yours never saw me till I talked to him on Léon's island."

She released her hands. After all, Gage had contrived to take them and seemed to have held them overlong. A hot blush blazed in his cheeks.

"Then you're not alone?"

"You saw Tom Cheadle."

"And this detective."

"We lost him." The blue eyes were grave. "That was why we put in at Léon's place. Our boat smashed on some rocks, and he—the detective—was drowned."

Drowning was indeed epidemic along these farthest Aleutian isles.

"Please," Bedford pleaded, "find *some* intelligible starting point to tell me the whole story."

She tried. While the pair of half-breeds consulted in the prow, she told him. With Léon's wife, she had been in the room beyond his at the island hut. The wife—both those natives, it appeared, did know more English than Bill guessed—warned her against the advent of a rough white. It must have been while Gage postponed repose that her curiosity overcame her own prudence and the whispered protests of her hostess.

"I went out the back door, very quietly. I saw somebody looking out of a window. Was it you?"

"Yes. I didn't notice you."

"I just peeped around that corner. Of course, I didn't recognize you—I never expected to see you up here. After what that woman had said, I didn't want to be seen, so I sneaked around the other way and came in at the front of the house to question Léon, because his squaw was so mysterious. I didn't know you'd brought anybody with you, but I found your guide there. Then they told me who you were."

"And you didn't send right in for me?"

Again she gave Bedford that faint smile of hers.

"If I had, what would you have done?"

"Said how glad I was to see you."

"But would you have let me come along with you the rest of the way to Irbit-Ishim?"

No, he couldn't have done that; he was too uncertain of what perils waited there, and it would have been far too great a responsibility. She had read him correctly.

"Of course not. I'd have left you in those Aleuts' care until I came back."

"I know it. Well, sending you up here while I waited at home, without ever having even started—that was one thing. But getting as far as this and stopping in such a place when Russ might be only a few days away—that was another. I could never have stood it, never, never! My boat was lost, but I *had* to go."

Bedford recognized his own type of determination. It was only masculine to disapprove of it, however, in a woman, so he said:

"You didn't have to."

"I did. So I fixed it up with this Bill of yours, telling him all about you and how I'd got you to start. These natives are awfully secretive. My Tom was across the island, trying to salvage something from our wreck, and Léon hadn't mentioned our presence here to Bill Cheadle. But I persuaded Bill that you'd be all right if we could stow away—Tom and I—till your boat was well at sea. I hunted up my own guide, and we canoed out to the *Red Sickle* and bribed this crew and hid. And that's all."

All? She did not know of the murder and suicide, and Gage was loath to tell her. She did not know of the miniature being on the island, and of that he must tell her. She did not care into what dangers this sturdy wind might be blowing here.

"It will be all right now, won't it?" she resumed, with the barest catch in her voice. "You wouldn't turn back and leave me waiting now?"

That took only a moment to answer.

He looked at the fast-fading speck fallen far astern—no living person there with whom to leave her! He looked ahead across dancing waves to an empty horizon. He looked down into those pleading eyes, that upturned face, combining energy and resolution with mysticism.

"You've got to come along," said he.

CHAPTER X.

WHITE WARNING.

BEDFORD berated Bill for his share in that deception, but it was only half-heartedly. Had the half-breed not taken the rôle he did take, the result would still have been the same, Gage admitted—the same violation of the tribal taboo, the same tragedy, the same necessity of taking Kyra on those last two laps of this long trail. Besides, the girl had made out a case persuasive and compelling when she first approached her friend's guide. Bill made it plain:

"She swear me dat she 'n' you workin' toget'er."

"Still, it was your duty to tell me."

Bill displayed his white teeth in his broad grin. "Mist' Bedfor', you not know dis young leddy, after all? She de kind always mak' do what she want."

Nevertheless, although the voyage progressed, that riddle in which it originated gave no sign of approaching solution. Tom Cheadle's scarred face puckered itself like his brother's over the discovery of the miniature in Léon's hut, but he could offer no explanation.

"Léon Léonovitch no bad man," he muttered. "No un'erstand' how come dere."

He was less of a talker than Bill, but equally positive. With a shrug of his heavy shoulders and an outthrusting of upturned brown palms, he dismissed the mystery as one not to be solved.

Kyra was told. She went white.

"My miniature—Russell's? Let me see it."

Gage laid it in those competent hands that were at last trembling.

"Yes." She bit her red underlip. "Yes, this is it."

"You've no guess as to how it came there?"

"Not one. You—you searched carefully, Gage?"

"We couldn't have missed a thing. There simply wasn't anything to find."

"That is why you stayed so long ashore?"

He nodded. His lean face was somber from memory of it.

Kyra started to put the picture in the pocket of her flannel shirt. Gently, Bedford took it from her, took it before he knew what he was doing, and their fingers touched.

"What do you want it for?" she asked.

He didn't know. He didn't need it. He reddened.

"I'd like to keep it a while longer—if you don't mind," he said.

She surrendered it silently.

Gage looked at it—to escape her gaze. What did its presence signify concerning Russ? That he had escaped? Escaped from what? Or that he was long past all escaping, having gained the final freedom, which lies beyond life? The pictured lips were parted; if they could only speak——

So time wore to a certain morning, days later. The next day they ought to pass the island which Bill had said lay next to that of their destination. The crew muttered. Gage did not, for some time, guess what it was about. The pair of half-breeds looked more and more serious. Bedford, busied for Kyra's comfort, never thought to ask why until he himself was forced to note how gray the sky was and lowering, and how there had been intensified that odor to which Bill had called his attention.

He was amidships with the guides.

"Snow?" he inquired smilingly.

They had no smiles in answer. Affirmative head shakings sufficed them.

"What of it?" said Gage.

Like most scientific men, however much they may also be men of action, he had small knowledge of any depart-

ment of science that did not neighbor on his own specialty or directly affect it, and he had little regard for their professors or for the folklore of their subject. Winter, to be sure, came early here; but why should it be immediately serious? And why should he accept the word, upon that point, of a couple of Cheadles?

He threw back his head and let the damp air beat his vigorous throat. He was approaching his goal; it would be the height of folly to falter now. Besides, the *Red Sickle* had already proceeded too far to allow repentance to be of practical value. He thought of the possible danger to Kyra—but he wouldn't believe the possible probable. Such vast expanses of surging water as these were could not close up against navigation in a week—no, nor yet in a month.

"What of it?" he repeated.

"Not like," said Bill squarely, his flat nose sniffing.

"How about you, Tom?"

Tom shrugged. "Bill, you tell me Mist' Bedfor' damn fool, an' he no turn back, no mat' what happen?"

Bill confirmed this.

"T'en no use talk."

"He certainly won't turn back!"

Kyra had come up to them. Standing there, with her head high and her bared head reflecting what light there was in tints of true gold, she made a figure both beautiful and courageous.

Her appearance heartened Gage.

"They think"—Gage felt his duty was to put the absurd case before her—"that the winter's coming. They say it comes in an hour and lasts about ten months—and that no boat can live in it."

She met him eye to eye. She replied:

"Russ is at Irbit-Ishim—or was. I'm going there."

Bill and Tom exchanged glances—whether of admiration or anxiety it would have been difficult to determine.

"I knew you'd feel that way, Kyra," said Bedford quietly.

"How else *could* I feel?"

She tried to make the guides talk of other things than their fears. In spite of the uneasiness for Russell Dean that must have been ravenously consuming her, she plied the brothers with questions of other days. Hadn't their father known the time when the seal islands were so full of their precious animals that, when they came out to sun themselves and fanned their faces with their flappers, the very ground appeared to squirm? Were their harsh voices really so loud as to sound above the breakers that stormed the rocks incessantly? Why were three year olds the best? And why were only the males killed?

Bedford helped her. He inquired again into that silly superstition about Perun's ghost.

To his surprise, Tom, although ready with a brief and material explanation, evinced on this topic a seriousness totally at variance to Bill's attitude. Tom pointed to the livid scar that made his bronzed flat face doubly sinister.

"You see?"

They couldn't help seeing.

"Heem do dat."

"The ghost?"

"What dey call heem." Tom quailed at some living memory. "Heem giant walrus."

"How about this, Bill?"

Bill grinned. "P'r'aps dat walrus what dey say ghost. One beeg walrus out here—very old, very fierce, beegest in worl'. No talk you of heem, 'cause no t'ink heem Perun, dat's all."

"Heem live Irbit-Ishim," said Tom, with a touch of awe in his voice.

"An' sometime' nex' island before dat," Bill quickly added.

Gage was mildly interested. He did

not know that walruses came this far below the arctic circle. Tom assured him that, here in the north Pacific, they did. Bedford had an idea that they were gregarious; the guide pronounced this one a solitary. Did they live long? He whom the pure Aleuts believed to embody the spirit of the offended Russian thunder god was old when Alexei Chirikof discovered the islands, yet he was as strong to-day as he had ever been—and far fiercer.

"Heem hate all not Rooshian or Aleut—kill lots—get stronger each time kill."

It was a good deal of talk for a man who had so far shown an inclination to taciturnity, but it ended soon. Gage smiled at Kyra, no smile replied, and Tom intercepted the scoffing message. When Bedford wanted to learn how and why Perun assailed Tom, both the half-breeds walked away without replying.

Kyra, looking across the waves, shivered.

"Cold?" Gage inquired. A new crispness had entered the air.

"No."

"You don't mean to say you believe such rot as this yarn about a century-old walrus that devours invaders, do you?"

She didn't turn. "It wouldn't make any difference one way or the other. But"—she waved an arm toward the rapidly graying sea—"I'm beginning to think that anything can happen up here. It's as if we were on another planet with other kinds of beings and other laws—or none. Oh, I'm honestly not afraid for myself; but when I think of Russ——"

Something silverlike appeared suddenly, sparkling in the uncovered gold of her hair. Gage bent to it—a snowflake.

It had come, then, the thing Bill had prophesied and dreaded, just as he said it would. One flake as yet only, but Bedford began to believe.

He gazed skyward. The air was filling with whirling white. His extended hand was sprinkled with crystals. He held it out to her.

"Look!"

"I know," said Kyra calmly. "I've been expecting this. And I don't care."

CHAPTER XI.

WHERE EAST IS WEST.

THE light died, the wind dropped. They had to haul sail and drift with the currents. A remorseless frigidity sent Kyra, protesting, to the forward of the two cabins which the *Red Sickle* boasted. The snow fell with silent persistence, making their semisloop a mute world of its own, cut off from sound and sight.

It continued for twenty-four hours—for forty-eight. When an opaque gray briefly replaced the grayer night, Gage could see spars as thick with snow as winter pines in the Adirondacks. The Aleuts shoveled the deck, like the street cleaners who used to shovel Syracuse thoroughfares in January. Bedford had had an idea that it didn't snow much at sea; he did not know these waters!

No, not by half. He had not guessed how soon the calm of the preliminary snowfall can be followed by raging tempest. But he was soon to learn it now.

"Storm!" cried Bill, ambling along the deck.

He pointed in a generally southerly direction. Gage's gaze, following thither, saw a black spot on the grayness, like the biblical token "no bigger than a man's hand." Yet, even while he looked, it grew to the size of a boy's kite—of a house—of an island—of a flying island that leaped to the heavens and suddenly obscured them.

From astern, a gigantic wall of water, black at base, dirty white and hissing atop, rolled toward the *Red Sickle*. It rushed forward at express-train speed.

Bedford thought of warning Kyra. He dived for the gangway, opened the cabin door and closed it just in time. The boat stood on end; a flood descended by the open hatch. Gage was thrown to his knees.

One gyrating lamp burned smokily, suspended from above by already tangled chains. It showed a cabin that might have been shaken by a Kansas tornado. It showed Kyra hanging on to the side of her bunk, but fully dressed and almost fully calm.

"What is it?"

Firstly"—Bedford regained a more nearly upright position by clutching the doorknob—"it is what they'd likely call a 'mild blow' in these seas. Secondly, it's what I'd describe as a——"

Down he went again as the *Red Sickle*, after seeming to spin upon some ghastly mountaintop, plunged headlong toward the ocean bottom. Bedford was kneeling in water that had passed under the door at the advent of the first cataract. He gained the bunk opposite Kyra's and somehow balanced himself thereon.

"Any danger?" she inquired.

It sounded as if she politely asked if he thought the country-club tennis courts would be hurt by the rain. He replied in kind:

"Not a bit. But considerable discomfort."

"I'm a good sailor," Kyra assured him above the noise that battered the boat on every side.

"I begin to believe I am," said Gage.

The wind became a bombardment, continuous, reverberating, deafening. Tons of water crashed upon the decks. The timbers screamed in agony and seemed about to be rent into fragments. Here in the cabin, man and woman could feel the boat totter up each succeeding height of wave hills, as if the effort were the last before utter collapse—then toboggan into depths that had no end to them.

Once Gage made his way back to deck. As he thrust his head into the buffeting tempest, one of the half-breed brothers—Bedford could not, in the howling, spray-swept darkness, tell which it was—staggered by.

"Can I help?" Gage bellowed.

"No help!" that black figure bawled reply. "All right here so far!"

Bedford went back, somehow, to Kyra. She was plucky, he thoroughly understood, but he did not know how long she could keep it up.

"You'd better try to get some sleep," he called to her from a yard's distance.

"I think I will," she called in answer.

He dragged a mattress to the wet floor since to doze in a bunk would have meant being thrown out of it. Kyra jumped to the mattress. She made with her arms a pillow for her golden head. Within a few minutes, though her face was hidden, the sight of her regular breathing told him that she slept like a child.

For hours he sat beside her, watching her tranquillity in the midst of pandemonium, half expecting death at any moment and yet, oddly, not much caring. Then, perhaps because her calm Russian resignation was contagious, perhaps because not even these perils could long overcrowd a mind so fully of a single purpose, he nodded, his own sea-heavy eyes closed—and when he opened them, the ocean, still rough enough in all conscience, was perceptibly less angry.

Kyra still slept. He made sure that she was as comfortable as the situation allowed, then went again on deck.

The *Red Sickle* had pugnaciously weathered the worst part of the storm,

and her crew engaged themselves at such repairs as were immediately possible and requisite. The wind blew ponderously, but with nothing like its recent force; the ocean heaved in long, gray rollers, foam crested. Tom Cheadle was invisible, but his brother, Bill, himself steered. He, as Gage drew near, spared one hand an instant to point ahead.

Dimly, Bedford made out an island, he could not tell how far away.

"That the one you spoke of?"

Bill inclined his large head.

"The one before Irbit-Ishim?"

"Yes." Bill's wide face was stolid. "We goin' put in dere."

"I thought we had enough water."

"Have."

"Then why stop? Don't tell me you've got any more friends to call on. I've had about enough of your insular acquaintances, William, though I suppose it would be as well to ask there if they've seen——"

"Nobody live here. Nobody! Used to. Left one hut. Nobody now. We want look over *Red Sickle* calm water —see if hurt."

"Can you do it in this sea? We've a woman aboard now. We've got to think of her."

Bill grunted:

"Me t'ink. Good harbor. Hard get to it, but me know course."

Bedford took the news to Kyra. When he came up with her, the island stood before them in full view through a veil of silver spray.

It was a mountain of snow behind a thundering orchestra of surf and beneath a leaden sky, back and forth across which armies of sea fowls circled madly, their cries drowned by the breakers' clamor. No other living thing, nor yet the trace of one, was visible; it seemed as if no other living thing had ever existed there, or could exist. Impossible to imagine what it might have been before the snow. White as marble at the water's edge, then mounting into atmospheric fields where the loftier air painted its arctic surface with tints that ranged from turquoise to sapphire, this solitary eminence had all the inhospitable, all the repellent grandeur of the ultimate north. It rose from the waves and towered into the clouds, self-sufficient, magnificent, fatal.

Kyra caught her breath.

"I didn't know there was anything like this inside our frontiers!"

"And I've brought you to it," said Gage. He wondered if he could ever bring her out of it, if the seas would not indeed close, as Bill had declared they must, before any retreat could be accomplished. "Will you forgive me?"

"Forgive you?" She raised her flushed cheeks, her brilliantly blue eyes. "You mean thank you. It's like a dream, Gage, this ice island; it's like something risen up when a snow fairy waves her wand." She seized his arm.

He said:

"Let's hope it wasn't the work of a bad fairy."

"No—no. It's too beautiful." She released him and pointed to the westward waste of water. "And somewhere out there is where Russ is—or was." Her voice faltered. "Somewhere on Irbit-Ishim, we'll either find him or—trace of him."

CHAPTER XII.

PERUN'S GHOST.

THAT harbor of which Bill had confidently spoken was easy enough to find, but hard to gain. Nobody could have gained it who fell short of perfect familiarity with the course, for a curving reef of rocks like gigantic tiger's teeth, half sunken—here and there triple rows of them—almost shut it off from the stormy sea. On both sides rose sheer cliffs—which Bedford saw

at once were of volcanic formation—to heights ranging from fifty to a hundred feet. Over yet other jagged rocks, the waters churned against the precipice foundations. Despite the violent movement of the little bay, ice had already formed here; these depths were shadowed, their narrow walls glittered with frozen spray, and overhead snow protruded beyond the edges of barriers that seemed to touch the deep-depending sky.

Tom had now the task of steering. Bill balanced his way to where Gage and Kyra stood.

"Old hut up dere," he said.

He pointed to a vertical promontory of solid stone which they were skirting so closely that they could nearly have touched it by leaning over the rail. It went straight up, so straight that they could see nothing at its summit except eaves of threatening snow.

"I wouldn't want to play in the hut's front yard," said Gage. "A fall down here would just about finish a fellow."

The *Red Sickle* sheered off. Spiky rocks clustered at this cliff's base also.

"Look here," said Kyra.

She pointed to a wide-mouthed cave directly above their heads. The perfectly preserved skeleton of some huge animal lay there—Gage would have guessed it to be the bones of a sea cow, a creature long extinct; but his glance was on the waters.

"Look *there!*" said he.

He need not have spoken, for nobody could have missed that to which he called attention. The thing challenged them; it demanded their startled regard by a vocalization that triumphed over the pounding of the waves—by a roar between the bay of a mastiff and the bellow of a bull.

They saw, holding to an icy rock by its enormously broad fore flappers, something that must have measured fifteen feet from bristled muzzle to short tail. It seemed as wide as a young elephant. Only a few wisps of yellowish-brown hair appeared on the huge surface, otherwise warty and wrinkled and streaked with the cicatrices of ancient fights. Out of a silvered jaw sprang tusks at least twenty inches long, yellowed by the years, curving inward, hideously thick and terrifyingly sharp. All this the people on the *Red Sickle* saw, while, watching them out of that flat head, long eyes smoldered in caverns—old—cunning—malevolent. From no beast had Bedford ever before received such an impression of craft and strength and hatred.

"A giant walrus!" cried Kyra.

"Perun's ghost!" shouted Bill. "Harpoon in cabin. Let me get!"

He wheeled—and found himself confronted by three of the Aleut crew.

Apart from their mere grumblings in fear of the advancing season, nothing could have been more docile than that crew had shown itself to be throughout the voyage; they were models of meek obedience. All the present trio, moreover, the hulking, long-armed half-breed could have taken on together and demolished with as many blows of his fists. Yet now they barred his way. They attempted no attack, but with immobile decision written on each smoky face, and with choking speech, they offered a determined resistance.

Gage had had some experience in hunting, in a small way, in the Adirondacks. At sight of that obnoxious monster below them, the lust of the chase jumped in his veins. He hurled himself to Bill's aid.

"Hi! What are you fellows trying to do? Let us by 'here!"

He seized one of the recalcitrant Aleuts. The other two bovinely blocked progress.

"Bill!" called Bedford.

Bill scowled, hesitated, laughed. He

said surprisingly something that seemed to be a surrender of his purpose, and that quieted them.

"What's all this about?" Gage demanded.

That monster on the rock roared a final defiance, and splashed out of sight under the swirling tide. Bill said:

"Dese fools guess me want kill Perun. Far islanders all dink if Perun killed, deir chil'n die—queeck—like dat. Rat'er die 'selves—do any damn t'ing protec' Perun. Oh, ver' well. Me get heem—*me* get heem some udder time."

On the north side of that cliff, they found a more or less suddenly revealed quiet anchorage. By mid-afternoon, Bill was having the *Red Sickle* speedily, but thoroughly, overhauled.

"You want go 'shore?" he inquired of Gage.

Bedford looked at Kyra.

"We'd better," said she.

"The island's uninhabited now," Bedford debated.

"But there might be some trace——"

"The snow's too deep, and it's new snow and still soft. We'd find nothing, and only get drenched."

"In the hut Bill spoke about, then."

Gage was gazing from this ominous inlet to the no less ominous heights that ringed it, and that furrow between his dark eyes contracted. Of course, he would explore the island, for they knew that Russell had come by this route and hadn't returned.. But there was no need for Kyra to land. Nobody could tell what might be found here; for a long while now Bedford had felt that, if Dean were ever discovered, he would not be discovered alive.

"I'll go alone."

She shook her golden head.

"Not alone. I'll go, too."

Bill grinningly sided with her:

"Easy land here. No danger up dere. Not too much snow by rocks. No more snow 'fore night."

"Please let me go," said Kyra.

Gage couldn't tell her his fears. She had her way.

To the foot of the cliff they were ferried a couple of boat lengths by an Aleut who, though ignorant of their language, sufficiently indicated a steep trail far too great in slope to retain an amount of ice or snow as would make ascent perilous. Directly up the face of that precipice, climbing would have baffled an expert Alpinist; but this tortuous path left sight of the *Red Sickle* behind, ran along the northern rocks and mounted them, if toilsomely at least more or less gradually. For more than a quarter of an hour, age and the girl ascended. He helped her with young ease over the worst places, and so they finally reached the top.

Here they stood upon a wide, natural platform. At its back, the white mountain went on up past the circling sea fowls and into the thickening clouds. On its surface lay the lately fallen snow, untrodden. Southward, near the edge of that precipice beneath which the walrus had appeared and disappeared and beyond which only the farther and empty waters were visible, there stood, beside a crumbling totem pole, a single old cabin. Its roof sagged; from its canting chimney issued no cheerful column of smoke.

They advanced at last through thigh-deep drifts. The door hung ajar.

"I'll go in first," said Bedford.

"I'll go with you," Kyra said.

But that he wouldn't allow. He entered and forced the door shut behind him.

An unnecessary precaution. The place was quite untenanted; only Heaven knew when it had not been so. Except for some board bunks along the walls and one lopsided table, the hut was denuded even of furniture.

He returned and reported. Her back to the apparently boatless sea, her face toward the desert snows, she lis-

tened with her hands clasped before her and with exactly that expression on her wistful face with which he had become familiar through the picture in his Syracuse study—through Dean's miniature of her in undergraduate days—long before ever he met their original.

"You told me those pictures were made years ago," he said; "but if that's so, you haven't changed a bit. Not even the North has changed you. I recognized you from my copy when you came to see me at the university, and up here anybody who'd seen the miniature——"

He stopped short. His firm jaws came together. In his dark eyes flamed the light of a suspicion, half formed as yet, but, if well founded, wholly devastating to them both.

"Kyra!"

CHAPTER XIII.

LEON'S LEGACY.

SHE looked at him silhouetted against a high snowdrift. The muscles of his face were knotted by the intensity of his emotion.

"What?" she asked. "What is it?"

Gage bent down toward her. "That night at Léon's——"

"Yes—yes?"

"It was while I was studying over the miniature—it must have been—that you went out and around by the other side and found Bill and Léon together in the common room."

Kyra was plainly puzzled.

She did not at all follow his thought, but she saw that something was afoot.

"I suppose it was. Why?"

"Wait. The shuttered windows kept out any outdoor light. Was the lamp going then?"

"I don't know. I think so. I don't remember."

"But there was light enough to see him—Bill—clearly? Think! You'd never seen him before, nor he you, you know; try to remember how he looked then."

"Why, just as he does now."

"Sure?"

"Surely. He was standing beside the table——"

"Then there *was* light enough to see him by?"

"Of course."

"Well, if you could see him, *he* could see you—enough, anyhow, wherever he was standing." Bedford clenched his fists. "And yet, a few minutes later, when I showed him the miniature, he pretended to have no notion of whose likeness it was!"

"He pretended——"

"Yes!"

"Why should he do that?"

"Because there was something wrong. Because he felt he had to lie."

"It was only so I could stow away on the *Red Sickle*."

This might be so; Gage was compelled, just then, to admit as much. Still, and in any case, Bill Cheadle had shown a manner well practiced in the art of deception; he was a consummate liar.

"What else could it have been," Kyra asked, "except that—except so I could fix things so you'd have to take me along?"

Bedford did not want to alarm her unnecessarily. "Perhaps you're right."

They had agreed that further search must be futile, because of the snow, until they could have the guides' and the crew's assistance. Gage led the way toward the descending trail.

"You don't think it *was* anything else?" Kyra persisted.

He turned to her. Fearless she was and competent, and her high head and resolute lips evinced these qualities. But there was anxiety in her eyes. She would not let that conquer—and yet he, on his part, mustn't reënforce it. While the cliff edge hid the *Red Sickle*, the

likely. Bill said something about a rescue expedition to be sent out in the spring—but if they were to be rescued then, why were they left now? That terror of winter wouldn't explain it. Tom and the crew together were numerous enough to mutiny and compel leader and passengers alike to attempt with them the race home that they were now making alone before this advancing season.

Besides, why did those Aleuts, punishing Bill for his designs against their sacred walrus, leave the designer at one of the two islands—Irbit-Ishim and this—which Perun was reputed especially to frequent? They had even left arms for the hunt!

"My precious guide's not such a good liar, after all," thought Bedford.

No, Bill was here—must be here—through some plan of his own forming. He was here far less to serve his employer than to watch him.

Nearly always, when the three were indoors, Bill remained close to his forced companions. Whenever Gage and Kyra went out, either they felt Bill's deep-set eyes on them from a window of the hut, or else he found some excuse to accompany or follow them—some excuse, too, to prevent them, supposing the weather would have allowed it, from going far.

"You were right," Kyra had early admitted to Bedford, "when you told me there was something crooked about this half-breed."

But Gage had cautioned her to hide her suspicions, at least for a while. There was nothing as yet to be gained, and there was much to be lost, by opposing the guide. He alone of the trio of castaways knew the North; in such respects as they shared interests in common, he must still be useful.

"But I'll bet he suspects that *we* suspect," the girl agreed reluctantly. "He can't think we're utter fools."

Well, that was reasonable enough, too. Yet, even so, the Oriental strain in Bill would, Gage felt, prompt him to maintain, as long as he could, the part he was now assuming. Sooner or later, of course, it might come to an open fight, which Bedford would welcome; meanwhile, the necessary thing was a cautious game of mutual mistrust and mutual pretense at its antithesis.

As he tossed on his alcoved board bed, Gage wrestled with the mystery. Moreover, Russell's whereabouts and fate; the two Deans' strange business, which could drag father and son to the jumping-off place, to the world's perilous end—these riddles were as fresh and as seemingly insoluble as their successors.

Outside, the deserted ocean; on this spot of land, the endless fall of snow growing thicker and thicker; from overhead the snow endlessly descending—snow, and a cold that ate into the bones and froze their marrow. Inside, a cold only slightly reduced in degree, a household like that of a trapped polar explorer; mistrust, too—perhaps danger—and a girl.

The girl! Around the edge of his alcove's front canvas curtain came an uncertain gleam from the fireplace. Gage, although he had not been long abed and should have been long asleep, drew, from the breast pocket of his flannel shirt, that miniature which he kept there, and looked at it by this fitful light. The questioning eyes, the red lips half parted, the wistful mysticism—in both reproduction and original, these had become part of his life.

In love? Was he in love?

He didn't dare to think. He wouldn't think. There was his duty to his friend, the duty for which he had sacrificed his old position and his new chance. He didn't regret it; he would go through with it; he would continue to put all his energy—would, if need be,

give his blood for it. All this he once again resolved, and the more vehemently because he would *not* say that he was in love with Kyra. If Russ still lived, she belonged to him, and he should have her. Bedford would bring them together.

But if Dean no longer lived?

Something made Gage look up. Perhaps the light had broadened. Yes, slowly and noiselessly that front curtain of the alcove was being drawn aside.

Bedford, sitting erect, saw a hairy fist that clutched it. He saw an abnormally long arm.

A log dropped resoundingly in the fireplace of the living room. The hand stopped pulling for a long three minutes. Then it went on again. Finally a head was poked cautiously in, sidewise. The light struck it—it had the broad face, the flat nose, the peering eyes of Bill Cheadle.

Gage's right hand still held the miniature, but his left groped under his pillow for the pistol, which never seemed so comforting as now.

"What do you want?"

His inquiry came like a challenge, but if the half-breed was startled, he did not show it. What he showed was the double row of his white teeth.

"Des look in, see if Mist' Bedfor' sleep comfor'ble."

Neither aboard the *Red Sickle* nor here had Bill ever done such a thing before. For the first time, Gage realized that there was another potential admirer of Kyra on this remote island—that this other might not possess the self-restraint of full civilization—and that, for such a semisavage, the safe murder of a fellow castaway could appear as the obvious means of clearing one's path. Nevertheless, Bedford, while keeping his hold on his weapon, did not draw it from under the sack pillow.

"What made you think I mightn't be comfortable?"

"Didn' hear no soun' out dere."

"That wasn't a sign of sleeplessness. I don't snore."

"Me dink——"

"What?"

"Me dink mebbe go hunt old Perun to-morrow—an' dink mebbe Mist' Bedfor' heem like go 'long."

A poor excuse! But it didn't go.

"So you came to tell me that?"

"*Da.* Yes—if you 'wake."

A likely story!

"I am. You have. Good night!"

They looked at each other. At last, with only a muttered return of that, "Good night," Bill redrew the curtain and shuffled away.

Until he heard the fellow go into his own alcove and lie down there, Gage waited. Only then did he release his pistol and slide down from his upright position to the support of an elbow—but even then he did not sleep, nor try to.

Bill had thus far persistently refused to allow any search of the island for trace of Russell. He had argued, and truly, that this was useless while the snow lasted, and had kept, by hook and by crook, both his protégés—or prisoners—always close to the hut. Yet he had not lost his interest in that malignant walrus; whenever he was sure that Kyra and Bedford were safely employed, he would creep to the perilous cliff edge and peer over into the depth below, looking for Perun. And there had been moments when Gage wondered if that giant beast, supposed to hate only non-Aleut and non-Russian Americans, was not actually looking for Bill, whose brother had, after all, felt the blow of those yellow tusks. Once, getting to the top of the precipice alone, Bedford saw the gigantic monster crouched on a pointed rock below—crouched and attendant, and glar-

ing upward ominously, as if in ambush for some special prey.

CHAPTER XV.

BY MOONLIGHT.

IT was nearly morning when Gage heard Kyra stirring, and Bill doing what Bedford had declared that he himself never did—snore.

"Kyra?" he called softly.

"Yes?"

She was awake. Her clear contralto, although it took his own key, showed as much.

"Get to the door as quietly as possible," Gage instructed her. "I'll join you there. I want to talk to you—and I don't want to do it within earshot of our friend here, in case he wakes up."

Across the now darkened room, he made his silent progress to the accompanying march music of the half-breed's rattling cacophony. Easy! Why hadn't they thought of this before? The two truant shadows met—opened the door gently—gently closed it, and walked together through the northern night.

The snow had ceased. Above the rollers of the leaden sea, the moon, now and again veiled by purplish mists, shone with a violet radiance, its reflected light glittering in shafts all along the opposite horizon, like the tips of spears. Behind the man and girl, the mountain shone as if made of polished steel.

"Has anything happened?" she asked.

"Nothing much, but a little something that I've decided I ought to tell you about. It mayn't mean what it seemed to; but I've gone over and over it in my mind, and I've come to the conclusion that you ought to be on your guard against—well, against what it might be."

Briefly, and with as little emphasis on its possibilities as might be, he sketched the scene in his alcove.

Kyra listened intently.

She wasn't scared, but she was serious.

"I'm all right. I have a revolver." She showed it to him, drawing it readily from beneath her shirt—a thoroughly workmanlike weapon. "And I can use it—always could. Besides, he doesn't want to kill me, but he may want to kill you."

"I don't think he'll succeed." Gage laughed shortly. "I merely wanted you to avoid making him show his cards, if you can—for when he does have to show them there'll be trouble, and, as I've said, until then he may be useful."

"We've learned how to live here. His only use to us now would be in getting away, and he says we can't attempt that, with any chance for our lives, till the winter's over."

"That's another thing I want to talk to you about. I don't believe the winter's really here."

"Not here?" They were standing beside a tall drift. She motioned toward the mounting fields of snow that covered the mountainside.

"I know," said he. "But it's too early. After all, even a professor of geology has to know something about climate—not much, but a little—and I used to know that little, bum prof as I was. I can't get it out of my head that this storm, or series of storms, is a freak—that we're still in for a thaw and a stretch of fine weather before real winter arrives."

"Even so, that one boat of ours—isn't it too frail to try an ocean trip?"

"Not if the weather breaks. And we can somehow keep in Bill's good graces and get him to manage it."

"To Irbit-Ishim?"

She meant to Dean—to the one place

where it was now at all likely to find him.

"Exactly," said Bedford.

"Then we'd better go back to the cabin now, before he—before Bill——" The sentence was left unfinished.

"Yes, we'd better go," Gage admitted.

But they did not start at once. Those last minutes of the night held them, and the beauty of the declining moon's rays on sea and snow tugged, against his will, at the man's heart. He talked of the problems that involved their presence here, but, while he talked of these, his dark eyes were intent on her oval face, and her gaze scoured the waters' western rim.

"We're friends, Kyra?"

She still looked toward the spot where, Bill had said, invisible Irbit-Ishim lay. "Why, of course."

"And always will be?"

"Always."

She spoke almost as Russ had spoken on that distant day when he pledged to Bedford a friendship now so bitterly bought.

"You see," said Gage, "we've been through a good deal together—and may have to go through a lot more."

"I'll never forget what you've done for me."

He made a gallant effort to restrain his coward heart. Shame helped him no less than her faith in the purity of his motive—shame and those motives' fundamental purity—their genuine loyalty to his vanished friend. "If I do love her," he thought, "she must never know." He said aloud truly: "I haven't done much; I may have let you in for something pretty desperate—but whatever I have done was done for you *and* Russ."

Then she drew her regard away from the distance and gave it to him. When he spoke of Russell, she could let the speaker have her whole attention. Her cheeks glowed, she shone with gratitude and admiration.

"Then I'll put it this way: *We'll* never forget"—she put out her hands—"Russ and I!"

He was about to take the proffered clasp, when there came across the silence of the northern night a sudden sound. It was the sound of a door flung open. He looked back at the hut, illuminated by the last light of the moon. Clearly defined in its doorway bulked the broad figure of the half-breed. Across the snow boomed his blatant voice:

"Mist' Bedfor', come back! Early mornin' bes' time for hunt de walrus. We got get Perun now—you an' me!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WALRUS HUNT.

"DO you suppose he was awake all the time?" asked Kyra, turning quickly to Bedford.

"Hush. I don't know," said Bedford. His wrath rose. "It doesn't matter."

Bill called again. There was no hint of anger in his voice.

"Is it a trap?" the girl inquired. "Does he want to get you out there?"

Gage laughed grimly.

"Not a chance of that. What advantage would he have afloat that he doesn't have ashore? I can take care of myself in both places. But he doesn't mean trouble—just now. I know the hunting bug, and he's got it—for this Perun. He'll think about nothing except that."

"Then it's best to go with him," Kyra advised.

"I'm not so sure," Gage delayed. "I've had about enough of his lying, and if he does want a show-down——"

"But you yourself said——"

"I don't care." All of Bedford's indignation against his own recent sen-

timental weakness rushed to join his resentment for this interruption, and these two forces egged on his dislike of the half-breed. "If he's got to be killed some time, I might as well kill him now."

She passed ahead of Gage and faced him.

"Don't you see?" she demanded. "Don't you *see?* We're alone with him here—and he knows something about Russ. In Lord knows how many hundreds of miles, he's the one person that does know. As long as we don't openly break with him, there's a chance, some chance, of trapping him into letting out the truth. It's not much of a chance, but it's all we've got; whereas, if you let him be *sure* that we—if you fight it will——"

Russell Dean's cause! That brought Bedford up short.

"Very well. I'll keep my hands off him as long as I can. Only, that's no reason for our leaving you alone here."

He, too, felt something of the huntsman's passion, but that he could easily subdue for the sake of his real mission among these northern islands. His life was not his own to risk until Dean had been found or accounted for.

Whether or not she realized this attitude, however, she did supply an argument that perforce somewhat altered it in the present instance. As cook, she knew that their food supply was insufficient for a long siege; as a listener to his hunting talks with Bill, she had learned that walrus meat was an important article in the diet of Chukchi and Eskimo. Supposing this Perun a fourth as old as the Aleuts declared—and that was, of course, impossible—his cured flesh would still furnish them with enough meat to last half through the winter.

Gage saw that duty and desire for once ran parallel.

"If our larder's really low——"

"It isn't yet, but it soon will be. Fortunately, we've got the best sort of cold storage for keeping things."

Bill called a third time.

"All right!" Bedford shouted back. "Coming!"

He went.

"Mornin', early, bes' time for walrus," said the half-breed. Again, he made no reference, either open or on his flat features, to the delay.

"Then let's start," Gage agreed.

They left Kyra at the cabin. What, she serenely and logically inquired of them, could possibly harm her on an uninhabited island, if she shut and barred the cabin door? Within half an hour, Bedford and Bill had descended the cliff trail and were putting out in the latter's little boat.

"How will we find him?" Gage inquired.

No need to define whom he meant. The guide grinned comprehension.

"He be wait' somewhere near. He un'erstan'—want duel."

"You mean he'll attack?"

"Guess yes."

"When we're protected by the boat?"

"Perun's tusks can rip off boat bottom, or pull side till capsize."

Again the hunter woke in Bedford. He almost forgot the truth of the position in which he stood toward Bill. Here was risk—if not the risk Gage wanted, risk anyhow.

They put off, Bill rattling instructions as to future action. They were at once in the midst of the harbor's whirling waters. *Pans,* or chunks of early ice, revolved and floated here. Bill chose to get alongside one of these, so that it might be used, after sighting their enemy, for a screen or bulwark, as the case might be.

Gage had been given the Aleut adaptation of an Eskimo lance. Bill, as the expert, bore his harpoon attached to a long rope of sealskin rawhide.

He worked with the *pan* so that it might serve as a float and drag, adroitly cutting two holes in it with his stout knife and into these fastening the rope at about its center. The harpoon-bearing end he retained in the boat. Thus was the line insured against sudden strain; thus, if it broke, merely a half of it would be lost, and thus, finally, could the latter half be used as a binder to another *pan,* should the blade strike their quarry and the quarry attempt to tow them out to open sea. There was a harpoon shaft already fitted to the boat; into it Bill stuck his harpoon—and they waited.

Not for long, though to Gage it seemed hours. The *pan* swung hither and thither at the eddies' will. The surf roared against the reef. Waking sea fowls became raucous just overhead. The hunters strained their eyes through the gloom of the high-walled inlet.

Came then that roar between a mastiff's and a bull's, which Bedford already knew. He stood up in their cockleshell; he might upset it, in which case they might soon be food for their opponent, but at least there was no longer need for concealment. As Bill had prophesied, they were as much hunted as hunters. Perun had seen them and dared them to come on.

He was poised on a neighboring ice floe, not twenty yards away. Three quarters of his enormous, warty and nearly bald body were clear of the water. His cavernous eyes, set far at either side of his wide skull, shone like beacons of evil and, while the quadruple skin folds of the neck rose and fell with each threatening elevation and dip of the howling head, his gigantic tusks were like twin scimitars.

"Take oars!" shouted Bill.

Gage took them.

"Pull! Right at heem—*pull!*"

One glance backward to make sure of direction—another to make sure the way was clear. Enough; Bedford braced his heels and flung his torso toward the stern of the boat.

They were to rush upon the waiting foe—and they did. One stroke, Gage had rapidly calculated, would be all they needed—and it was. He stowed the oars and turned.

The walrus had risen to strike. Bill rose in turn. Out shot the harpoon and——

Bedford did not have to know Aleut to comprehend the oath that followed. As if used to such methods of attack, as if he had expected this one and planned the best way to meet it, Perun had veered to his right. The yielding underneck was his vital spot; he received, it seemed deliberately, the weapon in the incredibly tough skin of his side, where it was virtually innocuous to him, but where, holding fast, it would serve to drag the boat and her two occupants to destruction.

The walrus dived. The line tightened with a snap. The boat raced forward and plunged. Its prow went under water.

Bill was hacking at the line. An eddy caught them and threw him. He nearly fell overboard. His knife flew yards away and sank instantly.

"Cut!" he yelled, his oily cheeks ashen. "You come cut!"

Bedford staggered aft. Another swirl, however, and he was thrown across the thwarts.

Either the line was too long for the depth of the harbor, or else that uncanny monster changed his purpose and preferred a surface attack. He came up bellowing, moisture running from him, lightnings bolting out of his red eyes. His stub of a tail thrashed the waves. Very old he might be, but surely no more powerful beast had ever wrought destruction in these unhallowed seas.

The boat veered against the *pan*—struck it—was knocked away.

"Cut!" Bill desperately vociferated.

Gage was perilously afoot again, knife drawn and lurching ahead. Would he be in time? The huge body stood up in the water. The great snout gaped. The fatal tusks were poised to tear away the gunwale—or to transfix any human being that stood there. Bill fell backward. Perun had scarcely two yards to come.

Bedford flung his whole body to the prow. Blindly he cut. That rawhide was unbelievably stubborn, but it yielded—it was severed. Gage had a glimpse of gaping jaws, and those tusks crashed downward.

But they missed. They missed by almost no distance, yet miss they did. Bill had got to the oars, and his long arms sent the boat flying landward before the recovering Bedford was able to find his lance, much less make use of it.

Doubtless the walrus could have followed, but certainly he did not. He uttered one more howl—a howl that dared them to come back to him and that vowed their extinction on some future occasion if they would not come back now. Then, with the harpoon still harmless in his flank, he sank from sight.

"Can't get heem dis way 't'out harpoon," said Bill, his Asiatic philosophy again upon its theme. "Try some way some time from shore. Me get heem yet."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WILD GEOLOGIST.

KYRA had inevitably broken her promise about shutting herself up in the cabin. She was waiting for them on the narrow strip of land at the base of the cliff.

"But I didn't promise," she protested. "I just said I couldn't be harmed if I did lock myself up. Well, I knew I wouldn't be harmed if I didn't, either, and I wasn't. But you, Gage—you?"

Bill glowered. "You here all time?"

"Yes," she said. "Tell me——"

"Nowhere else?"

She rebuked that by ignoring it.

"Gage, I could see a little of what happened." Her face gave evidence corroborative of her words. "I saw you in the prow and that horrible thing coming on at you. Then I put my hands over my eyes. Are you sure you're all right?"

"I was never nearer all right in my life," he told her, suppressing a desire to add that her concern had made him so. "Except," he added, "that I can't forgive Bill here for being such a bad shot with a harpoon."

"Not me bad shot," the half-breed interrupted. "Old Perun too wise. Still, me get heem nex' time sure—mebbe to-day."

His professional pride seemed badly wounded. Indeed, that, brooded over, appeared to conquer even his attention to the duties of warder. When they had got back to the hut, he took his rifle and started away again immediately, leaving his charges behind him—an amazing act.

"Never beat yet," he grumbled. "Now go back cliff; see if get shot at Perun."

His wards, however, doubted.

"What's he up to?" asked Kyra, when Bill had closed the door and departed.

"I don't know," said Bedford. "But it's not what he says he's up to—you can risk your life on that." Gage went to the scanty window and looked out.

Bill was striding through the snow without a backward head turn—but he was not going in the direction of the sea. He was going inland.

Bedford reached an instantaneous decision. If he told Kyra what he had

seen, as well as telling her what he meant to do, she would want to accompany him. So he said only this:

"If he *is* going to try for a pot shot at that walrus, I'd like to see it."

Well—she wanted to go along anyhow! Gage lost a good quarter hour in the task of dissuading her:

"Two can't hide from him as well as one," he finally declared.

"But if he's only gone gunning for Perun?"

"I said I didn't think so."

"And then you suddenly thought he had."

"Kyra——"

"Oh, of course"—she tossed her shining head—"if you're tired of me!"

Bedford was forced to the ultimate appeal:

"I'm not sure what he's after, but I do know he's hiding something—and that that something has some connection with whatever's happened to Russ."

As if it were a worn-out cloak, she tossed from her the mood of rebellion.

"I'm ashamed of myself. Go," she said.

He left her without more ado. He darted into the crisp air of the out of doors and followed Bill's telltale trail.

Telltale because it forsook the few paths that the marooned trio had so far beaten. It turned to the mountain's base across theretofore untrodden snow. Its maker was now nowhere in sight, but for the first three hundred yards and more nobody could have mistaken the way he went. It followed the curve of the cliffs, yet at a good distance from them. It rounded a small hillock.

Here, however, the pursuit became a harder matter. This shoulder of the mountain must have opposed itself to the snowstorm, or else some heat underground, volcanic without doubt, had done the trick; the tiny valley in which Bedford found himself was almost snowless, and, at least temporarily, the trail was lost.

Gage's geologic eye could see that the dell was of recent making—not twenty-five years old, anyhow. It was deep. Most likely it was the result of some late volcanic upheaval which had sent down here from the misty summits above deposits strong enough, or enough forcibly propelled, to drive down farther the loose soil that originally filled the spot. Bill had probably crossed in a more or less straight line, however; if Bedford did the same thing he would likely recover the half-breed's tracks on the other side.

That hypothesis he set out to prove, but again his awakened scientific senses got to work. Although he was resolutely going at a good pace and trying to keep his gaze ahead, that gaze would wander to the loose soil and free stones at the valley's top, against the raw mountainside.

Suddenly he wavered—stopped. He tried to go forward—really tried—and couldn't. He ran off at a right angle. Like a hound that has struck a new scent, he ran to that raw wound in the earth.

When he reëntered the cabin, he seemed a changed man. Rather, he seemed the man that Kyra had known for a few disturbing minutes at Syracuse University. He was, in point of fact, the whole-souled professor.

"Did you find him?" she asked.

Gage looked at her, uncomprehending. "Who?"

"Why, Bill Cheadle, of course."

Bedford held something in his cupped hands. "Cheadle? Why, no!"

"Gage!"

"No, I didn't find *him*. Er—will you please build up that fire?"

"Why?"

"Build up that fire—*please!*"

It wasn't a request; it was a command. She began to replenish the fire.

"Do tell me——"

"I can't. I don't know—yet. But I think I've found something else."

"What?"

"Oh," cried the changed Bedford, *"keep quiet!"*

She thought he had gone mad, but she did what she was ordered to do. He bustled about, after carefully depositing on the lopsided table that which his hands held. He busied himself by trying to convert their meager kitchen utensils into various other things—strange things, queer retorts, uncanny implements. He worked frantically. When he failed, he swore with chagrin; when he succeeded, he swore out of pure delight.

"Don't talk—don't *talk!*" That was his sole contribution to Kyra's attempts at bewildered conversation. Only once he added: "This isn't for me; it's for Russ."

That proved again efficacious. She did all that he bade her do, and, when he fell silent, she stood aside and mutely watched a process that she in nowise understood. Something was in the fire, and then——

Twenty minutes—forty—an hour.

Would he never finish?

He had paper and pencil. He made feverish calculations. At last he jumped up from the table, beating its splitting surface with both fists.

"Working this way, I can't half tell for sure, and yet I *know* it's true!"

Kyra had been most patient. She still retained the larger part of her Russian tranquillity, but she did say:

"Then try to tell me a little less than half."

His dark hair was tumbled by the long fingers he had been running through it. His dark cheeks were haggard from excitement. But, also from excitement, his eyes were lamps.

"It must be at least C-V. 7 plus!"

"What's that?"

"This!" He pointed to a little heap of ashes that he had retrieved from the fire. "C-V.'s 'calorific value'—and the highest known isn't quite six." His voice broke, but went on: "It's usually found in the newer strata, but this is yesterday's, you might say—it's the newest. It could be mined for pigments, or for the manufacture of sulphur and ferrous sulphate, like the Bohemian. But it's a hundred times more valuable as fuel."

She had listened, but she did not understand.

"Well?" she asked.

His last doubts fled before formulated speech; his conviction soared.

"Look at the ash—*look* at it!" He pointed again—a violent forefinger. "Why, it's bound to beat anything in Nassau or Bavaria. It doesn't powder too much, and yet it'll soften for briquettes at a new record minimum of heat, and without any cementing material. Its proportion of water is less than thirty—less than thirty, mind you. It'll put the Prussian, Saxony and Cologne mines out of business—yes, and all the European others. Why, when I saw it first, it was such a bright, pitchy black, I thought it was true coal."

"You know," said Kyra quietly—she was leaning almost languidly against the cabin wall—"all this doesn't mean a thing to me, Gage. Just what is it that you've found?"

He straightened. "Good heavens! —don't you really understand? It's lignite, and it's the best in the world, and it's apparently inexhaustible here!"

Kyra nodded—comprehendingly, but not, he saw, sympathetically.

"And what," she supplemented, "has all this got to do with Russ?"

Gage stared at her.

"Why, what I'm complimenting my-

self on is that he got his undergraduate interest in geology from me."

"Yes," said Kyra; "but how does your discovery of this—this lignite affect what we're after up here?"

Gage had taken off his coat to work before the fire; now he was thrusting his arms into the sleeves.

"That's just what I'm going to make sure of. Wait! Stay here. This time *will* you promise to stay indoors till I come back?" He gripped her shoulders. "Don't ask questions. It's for Russ, I tell you. Just promise me!"

The furious sincerity of his enthusiasm swept her out of herself.

"I promise," said she.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHILE THE PROMISE WAS KEPT.

BEDFORD rushed out of the cabin, but was careful to fasten its door tight. As for the window, he could only hope she would not use it as an observation post—or that he would not encounter the person he sought until out of sight from the hut. He made sure that his revolver was ready for action. He had his theory. With it he meant to confront Bill Cheadle, and, if the theory was in any particular correct, this confrontation would mean a fight.

The day was clear. The ocean shone in leaping argent. The snow-clad mountain blazed like a mountain of white fire. Gage meant to retake the half-breed's trail and, at a strategic place, await Bill's return along it.

He had, however, not far to go. From the precipice at the foot of which the beach lay, the cliffs retreated sharply inland for perhaps fifty yards—a convenient hummock concealing the cabin. As Bedford rounded this hummock, he saw Bill slightly strayed from his trail and bending over the sheer drop that yawned below him.

The guide saw Bedford and beckoned.

"Heem there!" He nodded at those depths. His face had more of the Tartar in it than ever, but it bore a white huntsman's excitement. "Perun! Me saw—den he heard—hide. Me keep still till come out—get a shot."

He beckoned again. Gage advanced. The drop was so great that he lay down to look over, lest dizziness seize him. A hundred feet, with not one projection to break a fall, he saw. There was the same swirl of angry water that he knew in the harbor, just around this high corner of volcanic stone. The green waves roared, broke into whiteness, and hissed like antediluvian serpents against and over rocks that might have been the bayonets of so many giants' muskets planted upright there. But no walrus was visible.

Bedford rose and drew well away. Pretense must end now.

"Come back here," he said.

"No—no," said Bill temporarily intent upon the chase. Wait—get a shot."

"Come *back* here," Gage repeated, retreating still farther. "I've got something more important to talk about than a warty walrus."

His tone was weighted with portent. Bill couldn't mistake it. Puzzled, he sprang to his feet—so puzzled that, as Bedford noted with grim satisfaction, he left, at the precipice edge, the rifle intended for Perun.

"What you want?"

Gage took his arm and walked at least ten paces inland. Then he turned his man about, back to the cliff.

"Where have you been?" he demanded.

The slant eyes regarded him evilly, then shot away. "Here."

"Ever since you left the cabin?"

"*Da.*"

"You're a liar."

Bill's head jerked toward his rifle. Probably he had no objection to the

slur on his character, but certainly he had the air of a man with a secret that he is determined to guard.

"Stand still!" Bedford warned him. "I don't know where you've been—but I can guess. And I do know why you've been there. I've been prospecting. I'm a geologist, Bill, if you know what that is, and I imagine you do, so there's no use your trying to bluff me. You'd better tell me the whole truth. A good half of this mountain behind us is made of lignite—brown coal—likely the best grade in the world. Now, then, come across with the facts about Russell Dean!"

With the velocity of there turns of an airplane executing a spiral, three things occurred:

Gage drew his revolver.

The long right arm of the gorillalike guide flashed upward with his knife.

Gage fired.

Not soon enough, though—that last. The human ape leaped, and his tremendous reach completed a bridge of the distance between them. The knife had missed Bedford's arm, but the impact knocked the revolver impotently upward and propelled it, freed from its owner's grasp, far to one side where it buried itself in the snow.

Gage had still the memory of his gymnasium training; he had once used gloves almost as well as oars. He jumped to the right and landed, in passing, a smashing left hook to his opponent's protruding jaw. Bulk lay all with Bill—brute strength, too, strong as Bedford happened to be—but that blow was as scientific as its dealer's knowledge of the Jurassic system or the laws of geological dynamics. Bill staggered a full six yards seaward.

This transient advantage must be followed up, or it would go forever. The guide possessed his knife; Gage was now unarmed. Even should Bill's weapon be forced from his hold as Bedford's had been, in a clinch, victory would almost certainly yield to the stark animality of the semisavage.

Almost! Well, something like a clinch had to be attempted—and quick. Gage sprang forward.

His right fist smashed into the flat face; then his fingers circled the throat and closed there. The other hand wreathed itself around the wrist below which flashed Bill's knife.

Cheadle jerked back, but could not at once jerk away—and could not stab. Bedford dug bone and finger nails into that oily throat, hanging on for dear life to that wrenching wrist. This enemy's other arm he could not, however, take care of, and now it took care of itself—and, almost, of Gage. It caught him across the eyes and drove his head back. His grip loosened; he fell to his knees; above him he saw the blade gleam.

Bedford flung himself to the right. The descending knife just missed his shoulder, and so mighty was the blow that Bill's body tottered after it. One more chance here. Gage saw and seized it. Only half rising, he flew toward the cliff edge—for there lay the discarded rifle. If he didn't get it in time to fire, he might club it—use it as a lance—use it——

He hadn't a quarter of a second's start. Bill, for all his weight, righted himself, took in the situation, bellowed an Aleut imprecation and, wheeling around, came after Bedford with astonishing speed.

That rifle lay—black and deadly and desirable—meticulously propped against a rock, less than one yard from the cliff's lip, safe from the surrounding snow. Gage ran at it. Bill gained. Gage knew it and, as a baseball runner slides for a base, he precipitated himself toward the rock. One arm was outflung. The snow was in his eyes, the snow enveloped him, but he touched

and closed upon the rifle. He swung it around and raised his head.

No opportunity to fire—no opportunity to lunge. Bill hurtled forward. Yet, in a situation of this sort, there is such a thing as going too fast, and that fatal error the false guide had committed. His momentum carried him past Bedford—past the weapon; but the latter, rising between his legs, caught one shin and tripped him.

Tripped him? It flung him headlong. It flung him——

Gage, on hands and knees, gasped. Bill was precipitated to the cliff edge. Its cornice of snow crumbled under his vast weight. He somehow twisted around. He yelled. For one tick of a watch, his yellow features contorted, he clawed the air. Then, even as his recent enemy went to his rescue, he plunged out of view.

Lying flat for safety, Bedford wriggled to the edge. The half-breed had missed the bayonets of the rocks—had fallen, those hundred feet, into deep water — had disappeared — appeared again, one hand above his head and still instinctively clutching the knife, the other beating at the waves. From drowning he might have saved himself, but no power on earth could have saved him from the death he straightway suffered. Out of the rocks' shadows appeared a cyclopean form—its hideous head emitted a bellow of triumph, the bay of a hunting mastiff, the blare of a maddened bull—its thick neck elongated—arched—its awful tusks descended——

Bill Cheadle, be it recorded, died game. His knife sank fatally into the soft underthroat of Perun, as Perun's tusks buried themselves in Bill's chest. The pair sank together.

Bubbles arose——

Something red arose——

But the hissing waves closed over all.

Bedford turned away, shuddering. He felt that never again would he want to see the ocean in which such tragedies could be enacted. Thus it was that he saw Kyra running toward him—and thus, too, it was that he did not see, scarcely a half mile distant, the figure of an Aleut who knelt upon the cliff's brink and, by the raising of his arms to heaven, gave evidence that he also had been witness to the newly finished drama.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHEN THE PROMISE WAS BROKEN.

IT has been very wrongly said that vows were invented to be fractured. Nevertheless, it is possible to imagine —and doubtless there have often occurred—hundreds of combinations of circumstances in which many, if not most, oaths may ethically be disregarded by their makers. Kyra considered the present a case in point.

"You told me you'd stay indoors," said Gage. He was still panting from the effects of his fight and those of what had followed it.

"I did," she remonstrated—"till I heard a shot. You don't think I'd stay in when I thought you might be hurt, do you?"

Her shining eyes—her shining hair —her shining teeth—in what way save one could he answer them? "Oh, all right!" he said.

"What was it?"

"Bill."

"He hurt you?" She stretched out anxious arms.

"He tried to. But what you heard was me trying to hurt him—and failing."

She gazed around. "Then where is he?"

"There," said Bedford, and pointed over the cliff. "He fell down there, and that walrus got him."

She heard him with horror, and yet with that mind for the practical which

is, after all, woman's characteristic. She walked to the precipice, looked over guardedly and came back with her hands before her eyes. For the special hideousness of the half-breed's death while dealing death to his killer, she plainly had a proper solicitude; toward that which had led up to it she turned merely her ever-inquiring mind. Facing Gage, she asked:

"You say you told him you guessed what he knew about Russ?"

"Yes. Of course, I don't really quite guess, but——"

"What was it?"

"This lignite."

"But I don't see. I didn't when you talked in that wild way up there in the cabin."

"I mean, firstly," said Gage, "that men like Russell's father and Russ himself don't go out to the jumping-off place just for the fun of it. I mean, secondly"—he began to check off his points on his fingers—"that all these drownings and disappearances and crimes committed and attempted must have a motive—and that there's no motive like money. Thirdly, I mean that lignite like the kind I've found here, in the quantities indicated, would supply the money motive. And I mean, finally, that if there is lignite in this island, and Bill knew about it, there might be lignite in Irbit-Ishim, and the Deans on the one hand and Bill on the other might have known about that—and might have thought it worth fighting for."

"You're not sure?"

"Morally. There's just one thing I need to complete my certainty. Bill went somewhere inland this morning—or somewhere west and north. The signs I found were merely a minor outcropping of what must be an enormous deposit. I'd like to follow his trail and see if there isn't a more spectacular one, and if he, like a miser, wasn't going to look at a part of the wealth he thought ought to be his."

Kyra took Gage's hand.

"Let's follow his trail right now. I can't bear to stop in this spot any longer, anyhow."

Together they picked up those double sets of footprints which a man now dead had so lately made in the virgin snow. Together they followed them.

A color suffusion equal to that of the entirely arctic regions drenched the landscape. The rays of the low-lying sun were reflected everywhere in an engulfing blaze. Millions upon millions of snow crystals had each become a separate heliograph, casting back to the sky the radiance that the sky gave them, and every face of every crystal transmuted to color the light it received. Rose—orange—alloyed yellow—blue; they passed from the sea's funereal tints to a fairyland of brilliant tints and dazzling hues.

Man and girl, they paused at the spot where Bedford had made his discovery, and he described it to Kyra in detail. They crossed that valley and easily recovered Bill's trail on the other side. They followed it around the foot of the mountain.

For the better part of an hour they went on thus. For quite an hour——

Then the mountain retreated rapidly. Abruptly the tracks turned northward around a massive boulder. This Gage and the girl circled—and stopped stock-still in marvel at what they saw before them.

It was a broad beach, sloping gently to an evidently excellent natural harbor. In the latter floated two boats of the mongrel type of the *Red Sickle;* on the former stood a house—well built, new, and, to judge from its smoking chimneys, occupied.

"I'll be—I'll be damned!" gasped Bedford.

"I hope *not,*" said Kyra.

Gage shouted. The girl tore off her jacket and waved it over her golden head. The couple began to run toward the house.

A door in the house opened and a trio of men issued thence. They stood still for a moment, shading their eyes with their hands and looking hard at the newcomers. Thereafter the three ran forward as fast as the pair advanced.

At a hundred yards, Kyra wavered:

"They—oh, Gage, I believe they've got guns!"

"In a place like this," said Bedford, "who wouldn't have?"

But he himself had none, and, after all, the mere presence of fellow creatures was no proof of their friendliness. This truth had been momentarily obscured by joy at finding that the island possessed other inhabitants and a seaworthy boat—and yet the trail which led here was a trail made by an enemy.

Again Gage stopped short. He held back Kyra. But they were in the center of the open beach. Retreat was out of the question, and those strangers came on.

Strangers? One, perhaps—a stoop-shouldered man with a long beard and rings in his red ears. But beside him trotted a fellow enough like Bill to be Bill's brother—a fellow who *must* be Bill's brother, Jim—the missing guide first of Russell's father and next of Russ. It must be because Bill Cheadle himself was dead, and because Tom Cheadle, the deserter, was the third member of the triumvirate.

"Put up hands!"

Tom said that, and three leveled weapons backed his order.

"What——" began Kyra.

"Do what they say," Bedford cautioned. "They mean business and we're unarmed."

"I'm not," said the girl, and reached inside her shirt.

The bearded man saw and read her movement. He shot. The bullet whistled close to her head, the wind of it actually rustling her golden hair.

Rage ruled Gage—or nearly. He was becoming friends with peril; he would have liked few things better than to attempt a hopeless fight, to brave death for the second—or was it the third?—time to-day. But, since Kyra was here and would not think of herself, he had to think of her.

"Put up your hands!" he urged. "It's our only chance for life."

With manifest reluctance, she did as he bade her—and clearly not because the enemy had issued a similar order. Bedford had set an example.

The trio consulted, in whispers, but without lowering their guard. Finally, Tom said:

"Keep hands so. Come here. Walk house ahead of us."

They had to do it.

"I feel like a fool," said the girl. Her fair cheeks were hot.

"I've proved I *am* one," said Bedford grimly.

"If ever we get out of this——" Kyra started.

Exactly what it all meant, or how—whatever it might mean—they even would get out of it, he couldn't conjecture.

Rapidly they were marched across the beach and into the house. A hall stretched before them. At its end a heavy door was unlocked and they were told to go in.

"Soon," scarred Tom Cheadle promised, "we come an' talk wit' you."

"Go to the devil!" Gage snapped.

"Go in," Tom again commanded.

There was nothing for it. In the prisoners went, and the door was banged and locked behind them.

This was a shuttered apartment, the shutters doubtless secured from the outside; but it was well lighted and well furnished, a combination bedroom and

sitting room. And some one else was a captive here.

"Kyra!"

Then some one bounded toward her.

"Russ!" she cried. "Oh, Russ!"

CHAPTER XX.

BLUE FOXES—AND OTHER KINDS.

RUSSELL DEAN it was, this chap as tall as Gage and as upstanding, but as blond as his friend was dark and, whatever he showed of hardships suffered and pain bravely endured, to all appearances not one day older than that on which he left Syracuse. His arms were around Kyra, hers around him. Bedford turned away, a gladly recognized pleasure at his heart, but a queer pain there, too.

"Come here!" Without releasing Kyra, Dean drew Gage to him and wrung his hand. "You old scout—you *are* a pal!"

The girl spoke. "I guess yes, and you can't guess how much of one, Russ. Do you know what he gave up to get here? He gave up a wonderful chance with a big mining firm, and, ever since he came across me, he's been risking his life for me—because it was for you!"

The lamplight shone on her eager face that had never been more beautiful.

Resolutely, Bedford put his pain from him. It was in his most everyday manner that he said:

"I'm sorry to have to tell you that you're engaged to an unmitigated exaggerator, Russ."

Dean laughed, and his laughter was contagious even in that prison.

"So you did get my message?" he pursued. "And you came away out here! It's wonderful—even if I *did* know I could count on you, Gage." Dean stroked the girl's hair, from which her disregarded hat had fallen. "But you, Kyra—*you?* In these clothes—in this place! And they've got you both, the two of you, prisoners. Tell me—you'll just have to tell me everything." He smiled as he said it.

Not yet, however. The girl insisted that his explanation take precedence, and Bedford supported her.

"Matter of majority," he ruled. "Well, you or your father gave it out that your interest in these islands was blue foxes. It looks to me as if you'd met up with some other kinds—not to mention wolves."

"It *was* blue foxes at first—and no roaring luck. Then, back from his next-to-last trip, dad happened to tell me about some queer stuff that Irbit-Ishim seemed regularly made up of, and I told him it sounded like lignite. He only rented from the old trading company, but now he got an option to buy. Of course, we had to keep our hopes secret till we'd made sure and completed the deal. Well, we couldn't afford to send an expert and risk all the publicity that would involve, too, so dad came up here to bring back samples, for if they proved O. K. we could easy raise capital." Russell passed a hand across his eyes. "He never came back. From what I've seen since, I believe Jim Cheadle drowned him—or let him drown. And it was my fault. If I'd never suggested that brown coal——"

He paused a moment. Finally, he resumed:

"I got worried and followed. I got hold of Jim,, and we'd no sooner reached this island than he got hold of me. Kyra, dear—Gage, do you know who these devils are? Oh, they told me once, when they wanted me to sell out for half of nothing! The Cheadle brothers are in it for a big stake, because Jim got the secret from dad and bargained for that. But the local head of the scheme is a crook with a beard, who comes from Petropavlovskii in Kamchatka, where he and his partners

run a whisky distillery and smuggle their stuff over to Alaska."

"We know *him!*" cried Kyra.

"He politely helped us to your door," said Bedford.

Dean continued:

"He calls himself Boriline—though anybody seems to take any name he likes over there. Anyhow, he has some knowledge of geology and so on. He verified Jim Cheadle's news—there's a better lignite on one or two of these islands than anywhere else in the world and more of it—good harbors, too. But the pick of the lot's Irbit-Ishim. Even if it can export only in summer, the company that owns it can meet the European demand with quality and prices that'll pretty near put the big concerns out of business in five years."

"So Boriline and his crowd want it?"

"Because I won't sell our option to them at their figure, they're keeping me prisoner till its time expires." Russell clenched his fists. "They're after a conveyance—and a paper denying improper influence. Well, the option has a slim month more to run, so they can outbid me then. But they'll never get me to sign their dirty documents!"

He began to pace the room with the nervous, angry strides of a caged tiger.

Kyra asked: "That letter you sent?"

"If I'd written to the authorities, it would have meant publicity, and the owners could try some legal hocus-pocus to cancel the option. I've no money for supreme court appeals. I thought then I might get away and clean up, whereas now——"

"Yes, now we're all caught. But I meant: how did you get *any* letter out of here?"

"There was an Aleut in Jim's crowd I could trust, because dad had been good to him. You've heard me speak of him, Kyra. His name's Panteleimon. He agreed to try a *bidarka* trip till he reached the nearest post office."

Bedford envisaged that: suspicion, pursuit, the message torn in two in one otherwise successful struggle to guard it—its remaining portion posted at last, the return as far as Chepany-Ber, and there murder as a punishment for the faithful Aleut who had been true to the tradition of the great saint whose name he bore.

"Your father must have had some trustworthy men on the fox farm, and if you'd sent this Panteleimon——"

"The Cheadles had squared the whole crowd. Trust them for that. They're the prize fixers."

"There wasn't one over there on Irbit-Ishim——"

Dean came to a stand.

"*'Over there?'*" he echoed. "Say, Gage, where do you think you are? *This* is Irbit-Ishim!"

Bedford and Kyra stared at each other. Then, by a common impulse, they stared at Dean.

"This is?"

"This?"

"Why, of course!"

Gage could have laughed—could have bitterly jeered his own stupidity—as there came to him the inspirational explanation of what Bill Cheadle had achieved.

"And I suppose the snows we've been having aren't the start of winter?"

"What are you talking about? I thought they were myself, but this gang here laughed at that idea. They all tell me these flurries are only weather freaks; winter's thirty or forty days away."

So dead Bill Cheadle's plot lay as clearly outspread as if he, living, laid it before them. They would go on, Kyra and Bedford; if taken forcibly back, they might talk and "make talk" —dangerously, and too soon. So they were marooned, and watched, on the very spot they sought—kept to one quarter of it and in ignorance of the

rest. It was the safest place to have them, because, if they proved themselves unruly, help for Bill waited always here, just around the corner of the mountain.

"Russ," said Gage, "you've no right to blame yourself for what happened to your father. You might as well say it was my fault for originally interesting you in geology. But when I think of what I've brought Kyra into——"

"Nonsense," said Kyra.

Dean grabbed Bedford and shook him.

"Shut up! What if the old lignite *is* lost? They'll have to let us go when the time's up. Nobody'll ever believe us, of course, but we're not going to be killed in the meantime; Boriline's too crafty to hurt us, and——"

A revolver report interrupted him—a bang that seemed to come from the front of the hall, outside their locked door.

"What——"

Cries—a rush of booted feet. Another shot. The lock screeched. The door was torn open.

CHAPTER XXI.

VIVIEN.

JIM CHEADLE literally fell into the room, rage accentuating inherited physical characteristics until he looked completely Tartar. Tom tottered after him, his scar livid in a flaming face. These were fighters even if in retreat, but last came earringed Boriline in a panic. A bullet had grazed his forehead, and blood flowed down into his beard.

Shots followed them. All three were no sooner inside than they shoved shut the door. They jostled one another as they drove home an inside bolt, and while they were thus occupied, there came another clamor of feet down the hall. The panels groaned as the weight of bodies hurled itself against them.

Gage and Russell had dragged Kyra to a side wall, out of the direct line of fire. Dean called above the racket:

"What's up?"

The two Cheadles were hauling all the furniture in the room and piling it together to reënforce the door, regardless of breakage. They paid no attention to their prisoners. Boriline, on the other hand, looking more and more scared, darted to the wall and cringed beside Kyra; he gasped out a broken Slavic sentence while he dabbed his head with a red bandanna handkerchief of the sort sold for a few kopeks in the market places of Siberian towns.

"What's all that?" Bedford demanded in his turn. He had to yell.

The alien yammered. He had passed far beyond his scant English.

"Kyra," said Dean, "your mother's Russian—you know the language a little. Make him talk."

In this confusion, she hadn't yet become conscious of Boriline's proximity. The anger of an outraged race fired her cheeks, as she said:

"Mother's not *his* kind of Russian!"

"This isn't politics—and you can understand him."

"I don't want to." She stepped away, as if the fellow's clothes might touch her. "I don't want to talk to him!"

It was Gage who prevailed upon her. She quixotically felt that she owed him too much for his recent protection to deny this favor. The frenzied dragging and piling of furniture continued to an accompaniment of Aleutian oaths from the surviving Cheadles. The blows on the other side of the door increased in force and furry. Out there, somebody fired; it must have been point-blank at a panel—the door was thick, but splinters protruded. Amid this pandemonium, Kyra, reluctantly, pressed her inquiries.

"He says——"

They bent to hear her.

"He says one of their Aleuts saw Bill kill Perun and just got here with the news. To take away the curse of Perun's death, the Aleuts are going to kill us all because they think we were all Bill's friends." She spoke as if the thing no more affected her than a similar happening on the Dog Star.

Not so her companions. While concussions thundered upon the door, Gage pointed to the room's farthest corner.

"Get there! Lie down—flat!"

He half dragged, half flung her, to the spot. Then Dean and he, urged by a common impulse, rushed to the barricade and began to seek weapons by tugging off legs from the table that, upturned, lay there. The guides shrieked and swung revolvers upon them.

"It's all right," Russell shouted; "we're with *you!*"

"For the present," Bedford supplemented.

They carried conviction. While Boriline sat on the floor, babbling incoherent terror and dabbing at his red forehead with his red bandanna, the Cheadles' attention reverted to strengthening that barricade.

Useless! The blows suddenly ceased. There was a pattering up the hall.

"They've gone for some sort of battering-ram," said Gage.

Tom Cheadle nodded.

"How many of them are there?"

"All dose Aleuts on Irbit-Ishim."

"But how many?"

"Eighteen—twen'y."

"Armed?"

" 'Mos' all."

A rush—*bang!*

They had found it—their ram. The impact came high up, above the reënforcing material, and it was deafening.

"Get low," Tom cautioned. He himself stooped, and his brother followed this example. "Don' show more body for mark dan can help. Den we shoot, you hit, over top when come in."

Bang!

The door was split. The bolt bent. Bedford saw that its screws were springing from their sockets.

"The next time——"

He was right. There was scarcely a breathing space. A third withdrawal, followed by a third charge and a third concussion. The door smashed inward, striking Jim as he half rose to fire, and knocking him senseless. After the door poked a leveled mast, thick end foremost, and, dropping it and drawing revolvers, a crowd of flat-faced, greasy Aleuts swarmed over the heaped furniture.

Russell dived for the senseless Jim's weapon. To his utter amazement, Gage knocked it out of his grasp—struck Tom a club blow on the ear that felled him—dropped the offending table leg—raised one hand palm open as if in token of surrender, and, with the other, secured and presented, butt out, the succumbing Tom's only means of defense.

"Can any of you fellows understand anything but Russian and Aleut?"

Amid the toppling débris, Dean struggled to him:

"Are you crazy?"

"Shut up! We can always fight if we have to, but, first, I'm going to try something that's better than battling two to one." Bedford pushed Russell back and stood with his dark head erect, his dark eyes glowing fearlessly. "Because, if you can," he continued to the invaders, "and if you can understand common sense, too, I'll tell you something worth hearing."

If Russell was amazed; the Aleuts were virtually turned to stone. As a matter of fact, they did indeed understand his words only imperfectly, but his gesture, his tone, nobody could have misinterpreted—while nobody could read the riddle of an attitude that plainly combined surrender with daring. One of them, a hulking figure and

clearly their extemporized leader, did, almost timidly, accept the proffered firearm; but the remainder poised here, transfixed in the height of action, their flat faces bewildered, their wide mouths open, their slant eyes abulge. It was as if a blow of black magic had struck them—and that that black magic was about to begin nefarious work they would doubtless soon believe.

"No un'erstan' ver' much," said their leader. He made a mighty effort to thwart this coming spell: "You-all got die."

"Some time, yes—just yet, no. Why, you loony nuts——"

"Look out! Gage, *look out!*"

That came from Kyra, at the back of the room. Bedford spun around. Behind him, knife in hand, knelt the earringed Boriline. The traitor to his country justly suspected betrayal from Gage, and so was attempting one treason more. Bedford grabbed the handy beard. Boriline squeaked. The knife clattered to the floor.

"Just the man I need," said Gage. "Kyra, Mr. What's-his name is kindly going to translate to our friends a little explanation that I'll make, and I'll be obliged if you come here and tab up on his Russian, to see that he doesn't inadvertently get us in wrong."

A strange exultation, a kind of madness, possessed Gage; he began the longest lecture he had ever delivered outside of a classroom:

"Come to think of it, Kyra, *you'd* better be chief speaker on our program; they'll believe a lady. Firstly, I want to thank them for opening this door for us—which was one thing I wanted them to do from the minute they started trouble, because, as you'll point out and Comrade Boriline'll corroborate if he knows what's good for him, it's been a prison door for you and Russ and me." Habit reasserted itself; Bedford checked off his verbal points on his fingers. "Secondly, you'll tell these gentlemen how Perun's enemies have been *our* enemies. Russ, will you please give Tom another tap, and sit on Jim's chest? They seem to be coming to. And thirdly, Kyra, you'll make our sturdy Aleuts see that Perun, as Bill's executioner, was our ally, so they ought to be our allies, too, and that if they are, we'll lodge Boriline, Cheadle Brothers & Co. in a U. S. jail on the charge of attempted fraud, or kidnaping, or forcible restraint, or something—where they'll be a lot more unhappy than in the Aleutian land of spirits departed."

He stopped. But he had an addition to make. By Bodiline's beard, he jerked that worthy's frightened face close to his own. He whispered:

"P. S.: If you don't confess and back up every word Miss Carrington says, I'll turn you over to the tender mercies of these far islanders."

It had succeeded, as the simple line of action almost always does. The Aleuts, convinced and contented at the prospect of proper punishment for the gang, a leading member of which had killed their sacred monster, were back at work for the firm of Dean & Son. In the room where Russ had so long been a prisoner, the two Cheadles and Boroline were now prisoners awaiting the casual call of that government boat which the deputy commissioner had mentioned. The *Red Sickle,* serenely appropriated, was about to sail for the distant mainland—and home.

"There aren't many friends like you, Gage," said blond Russell.

"There aren't *any* others," said Kyra, the golden sunlight on her golden hair, as she squeezed the other hand—but gave the glory of her Russian-blue eyes to her fiancé.

"Of course, as I told you, you're in on this lignite deal," Dean continued.

"Don't you dare say 'No,' after what you gave up to come here, and what you risked, and what you did for Kyra —and me."

Bedford turned his dark gaze away from them and the sea and looked, as if it really interested him, at the island mountain of brown coal:

"I haven't done a thing worth talking about, but I'm a born grafter. I'll take the partnership you've proposed—and be the company's expert. The North's been a rough Amazon to me so far, but I've fallen in love with—with her—and that's why I want to stay here on the jumping-off place. Only, I warn you: you're giving me a lot more than I deserve."

Dean's smile faded.

"I'm afraid I'm not giving you anything. The option's bound to lapse. We can't get even to a telegraph office, let alone a bank, till at least three days before the expiration date—and I haven't such financial connections that I can raise the purchase price by wire."

"Oh, that reminds me of something." Gage fumbled in his pockets—brought out a paper. "I can. Is the figure mentioned in this all right? If it isn't, change it—and, anyway, file it on the first wire you come to. It'll produce the coin, because I think I know my man—and I know he knows me."

It was a draft telegram of portentous proportions:

J. T. Edmunds, Equitable Building, New York.—Or to be forwarded.

Strictly confidential. Declined your Chilean offer in order investigate certain matter for my reliable friend Russell Dean which just completed. Wire him at address following. By thorough personal inspection made, I guarantee he owns option best lignite fields extant. Needs immediate capital to lift. Best references. Stake my own reputation this is lifetime opportunity your firm to join him and me. Situation: Aleutian Islands. Who's crazy now?

To this was appended a full technical description of the deposits and harborage. And there was appended to that the offer of a quarter interest in return for the required cash advanced at six per cent.

"Edmunds is absolutely square and has the lignite bug bad," said Bedford. "He's got it so bad that a gun at his head couldn't keep him from snatching this chance."

So the boat sailed without Gage. She sailed into a yellow, eastward-lying mist that hid the horizon there like the radiance sent forth by paradise and hiding the heavenly coasts—and she sailed with a young man and young woman handclasped in the stern and waving each a free hand to Bedford.

He waited till the aureate haze shut them from his straining sight. Then he turned toward the mountain and the building at its base where his life's work was to be—but as he went he drew from an inner pocket a certain miniature.

"Of course," he said to its wistful face, "you're not really my property; you're his—or theirs. But then they've forgotten you—just as they're quite soon—dear people!—to forget everything of *me* except the geologist part of my make-up. So I hardly think you can call it stealing—and *I* won't call *you* anything but the name I first knew you by: Botticelli's—I mean *my*—'Vivien.'"

In next week's POPULAR *the novel will be "Blind Flyers," by J. H. Greene, a story of aviation and radio that is a genuine thriller from beginning to end. The action takes place in and above California and Mexico, and you may be sure that it is action "plus." In next week's issue of* THE POPULAR STORIES, *December 24th.*

Panax

By Clay Perry

Author of "Roll Her, River Rat!" "In the 'Windig' Wind," Etc.

Poor Tommy Severn was in a bad way when his friend, Jim Ryan, persuaded him to see Doctor Fan Ch'hi. But Fan Ch'hi, "Highland Camp," and "panax" turned the trick.

SIX doctors had given Tommy Severn up, and he himself had given up one thousand dollars to a specialist who called him a hereditary hypochondriac, when Jim Ryan stepped in. It was just about time, for Tommy was ripe for astrology, spiritualism, and hypnotism. He had become an "interesting case." A doctor who was one of the most successful sympathizers in Manhattan had divined what Tommy's mother, Mrs. Smythe-Severn, really wanted, and had invented a name for mental shell shock which is too shocking to be used, here; but which was featured in the pseudo-medical journals with its inventor's name attached and became almost as famous as the old-fashioned "brain storm." Tommy had been trimmed with almost everything save cold steel. His disease was so rare that he had not even lost his vermiform appendix. Mrs. Smythe-Severn simply would not consent to operations. She was more to blame for Tommy's condition than Tommy himself.

It had all started when Tommy came home from the war—which he had fought at headquarters in a Southern training camp—with a waxen complexion, like old ivory, and a disinclination to do any physical, mental or spiritual labor. One doctor was brutal enough to guess that Tommy had an open valve in his heart. A psycho-

analyst was just about as brutal, but he used more complicated language. However, he was mistaken. Tommy had all the opportunity in the world to inherit morbid tendencies, but he was simply a cheerful, likable victim of the powers of suggestion.

Jim Ryan looked Tommy up, looked him over, and thought of his old friend Doctor Fan Ch'hi. Jim had been in the marines and was familiar with many strange corners of the earth. He had met Fan Ch'hi at a corner in Shanghai, years before, as that estimable gentleman fled from a being of his own color but different political persuasion, armed with a poleax. Jim had halted the execution and executed the executioner. In gratitude, Fan Ch'hi had proceeded to bestow upon Jim a liberal education in the ancient and modern history of China, and had revealed some of the mysteries of the practice of medicine in the Orient, where it is the custom for the doctor to attend the patient while he is well instead of waiting until he is ill.

Fan Ch'hi was now in America, a wealthy and powerful merchant, with luxurious apartments in a wretched warren in Mott Street. Jim went to see him and asked him to perform a miracle. This Fan Ch'hi promised to do. He was ready to do anything for his friend and savior, Top Sergeant Ryan. But it was Jim who performed the first miracle, by getting Mrs. Smythe-Severn to allow him and Betty Harris to take Tommy to Fan Ch'hi. Betty Harris was the principal reason why Tommy wanted to live. She was one of those who had not given Tommy up.

Fan Ch'hi served them tea in cups without handles, from a pot without a spout, without cream or sugar, but with a few drops of some aromatic liquid sprinkled in it, which gave Tommy the first glow he had had in months.

Tommy had been going without so many things for so long that he emptied his tiny cup every time Fan Ch'hi filled it, for tea was one of the things he could have. Each time, he noticed, his host sprinkled just a few drops of something in the tea, from a cute little brown jug. After his sixth cup he remarked:

"Thash shplendid tea, Doc—Fanshy. Wish has shome 'shelf."

Doctor Fan Ch'hi bowed graciously and tipped up the jug, sadly.

"There is a very rare plant which grows principally in the mountains of Chinese Tartary," he said. "From it is made a precious elixir, which is sometimes known, in China, as the physician's remedy. It is the law that all physicians must partake of the remedies which they prescribe for others, but this essence is one which physicians cherish especially for themselves. It is the only medicine which I have ever taken, and it has cured all diseases, removed exhaustion of the body and the mind and has brought me to the age of ninety-seven years without the loss of a night's sleep from internal causes."

"Ninety-sheven!" exclaimed Tommy, sitting up straight and staring into the smooth, glistening face of the sage. "Almosht hun'red years old! Swonnerful!"

"My honorable father lived to be one hundred and ten years old, and my most honorable grandfather died at the age of one hundred and fifteen. Both were physicians, claiming ancient and honorable descent from a disciple of Confucius, who joined the science of healing the mind to that of healing the body. They attributed their long life to the use of this *chun tzu,* or prince of plants. But now it has become so rare that, in some portions of China, notably in Korea and Manchuria, it is valued at as much as two hundred dol-

lars an ounce. That is on account of much marching of armies back and forth and up and down, between the great sea and the great wall, so that it is impossible for the caravans to bring it east from Tartary, or for it to be transported west from the coastal provinces. It has been found necessary to secure importation from the Moluccas or Spice Islands of inferior varieties known as *panax cochleatus* and *panax fruiticosui,* and even from North America, the Occidental plant known as *panax araliace,* which, by some botanists is believed to be of the same species as that from Tartary."

Tommy looked into his empty cup and heaved a sigh.

"Thish stuff," he said, "has shert'nly got a kick in it. I'd like to buy shome for 'shelf."

Fan Ch'hi looked solemn, doubtful and mysterious. He tucked his hands in his voluminous sleeves. The room was filled with a pungent, pleasant odor —for those who like it. Most Chinatown visitors think it is the odor of opium, but it is mostly a mixture of incense and soap. Somewhere, far back of the rich red hangings which concealed the cracked plaster of the old room sounded the faint tinkle of a gong. A servant was lighting incense before a private shrine dedicated to Top Sergeant Ryan, and before which perpetual prayers of gratitude were offered at Fan Ch'hi's orders, for the saving of his life by the former marine.

"I am deeply grieved," said Doctor Fan Ch'hi. "It is forbidden me to prescribe for a citizen of this land. In my own country I am a physician, but here it is against the law. It would be necessary for you to seek out this plant for yourself. Its chief virtue lies in finding and gathering and preparing the root with one's own hands. It is more than likely that the American variety is possessed of the same virtues for one born in this land, as that of China for a native of that, my great country."

"Can't you buy it at drug shtore?" queried Tommy. "Don't care if it costs thousand dollars an ounce."

"There is sold at the pharmacies a dried and inferior root which is known to commerce by a name which I forget," Fan Ch'hi stated. "However, no confidence can be reposed in that. There are three or four plants which bear a resemblance to the *panax araliaceæ,* just as there are many toadstools which look like mushrooms. The true herb is gathered secretly by initiates into the mysteries of Chinese medicine."

"I should like very much to be inish —initschated," declared Tommy, with difficulty, but also with great earnestness.

Fan Ch'hi took in a sharp breath and closed his eyes.

"You ask for the secret of the strength of the mighty Mongols, of Kubla Khan and the Golden Horde, according to the legend which accredits them with first discovering the powers of the plant," he said. "It is also believed that your native Americans, who are erroneously called Indians, but whose ancestry was doubtless from China, had discovered and made use of the native herb. Only by this explanation can the splendid health, strength, endurance and virtue of the Indians be accounted for. It is still used, to the west of your Alleghenies, as a medicine."

"West of Alleghenies?" mused Tommy. "Is that nearest place can find it?"

"The nearest place," responded Fan Ch'hi politely, "is doubtless in the northern hills known as the Berkshire Mountains, of the western part of your province of Massachusetts."

"The Berkshire Hills!" exclaimed

Jim Ryan, opening his mouth for the first time.

"Berk'shills," reiterated Tommy. "I know the Berk'shills very well. S'pose we go fin' some?" he suggested to Jim.

"For my friend Top Sergeant Ryan I will do anything within my power," remarked Fan Ch'hi, bowing to Jim.

"Could you tell us the likely places to look for it—the American variety, I mean—and describe it for us, so we'd know it from the imitations?" queried Jim. "That is, if you really think it will do you any good, Tommy."

"Course it will!" declared Tommy, rubbing his stomach softly. "Can feel it already."

"I will describe it, as it grows among the cypresses and pines and oaks of Tartary," said Fan Ch'hi, in a soft, sing-song voice. "This precious *panax, chun tzu* among plants, resembles, in some ways, an umbrella, in its most perfect form. It may also look quite differently, but it has a stem which rises from one to two feet in height, with leaves on long stalks which are five fingered, which assume a pear shape in the larger plants. They are almost quite smooth. Their seed is of umbels, on a long terminal stalk. They turn bright red in the late summer. They are shiny and smooth. For each year of the plant's growth, at the base of the stem, there appears a resemblance of a joint or bud. The root is white and tough"—he lowered his voice—"and it grows frequently in the shape of the body of a man, showing clearly the purpose for which it was intended, to give life and strength to the body of man. In the root it is mucilaginous, slightly bitter, aromatic to the taste. It is most likely to be found in high lands, where there is partial shade, along rock ridges, amid hardwood trees. Thus and so, if at all, will the *panax araliaceæ* be found."

He clapped his hands; and a servant entered, and at his command brought some beautifully painted plates illustrating the shape, size, color and characteristics of the famed plant. These he gave to Jim Ryan.

Just before the party left Fan Ch'hi also presented to Jim a little brown jug and a caddy of tea.

"I do not prescribe this as a medicine for your friend," he explained meticulously. "These are made as a gift to you. May you have good luck."

"I'm going to be the doctor," said Jim grimly. "I'll do the prescribing from now on."

Jim had once been an athletic instructor in charge of a football squad.

Mrs. Smythe-Severn also knew the Berkshire Hills. She had spent charming days at a summer palace described as a Lenox cottage, where formal gardens flourished, in which rare flowers grew and water plashed on marble, and green grass grew all around. It seemed a splendid place for Tommy to go, particularly as it pleased her to think that a famous oriental physician had prescribed it and some sort of treatment which she got as "æration of the pancreas," since she was familiar with medical terms.

Jim Ryan spoke of camping and casually placed an elaborate folder descriptive of a fashionable camp for men only, where Mrs. Smythe-Severn would find it. He promised to telegraph her daily bulletins of Tommy's condition.

They set off in the huge Ajaz, Stevens driving, and with Betty Harris, disguised as a nurse, on the front seat beside him. Tommy was eased into the special lounge seat his mother had caused to be constructed and Jim pulled down the front curtain, shutting off the chauffeur's compartment, got in with Tommy, and they rambled up the Hudson.

Rooms had been engaged for them by Mrs. Smythe-Severn, at the Aspinwall, overlooking the sweet scene of Lake Mahkeenac and the fair spread of the Lenox golf course—elevator, private dining rooms or meal service in the room, bohemian orchestra playing chamber music in the lobby, waxed dancing floor gleaming at the eastern end, and carefully pruned pines all about the genteel lawns.

The nurse had got off, in the village, to visit friends, Jim declared, as he made tea for Tommy in their suite. He explained to Tommy that Fan Ch'hi had sacrificed a few gills of the precious stuff to keep him going until they found some native *panax*. Tommy went to sleep like a lamb and Jim went down and danced with Betty Harris and some of her friends from the village. If Tommy could have seen her he wouldn't have slept for nearly a week.

"If we weren't doing this for Tommy's sake, I'd be ashamed of myself," Betty said to Jim. "When shall I see him again?"

Jim was a loyal chap. He was partial to eyes and Betty had them, but he looked somewhere else.

"At the end of a week or ten days we shall meet you at an appointed place. I'll tell Stevens."

"Oh, you will be careful of him, won't you?" she begged.

"Haven't I gone and written out daily bulletins for his mother?" Jim demanded, and produced a sheaf of telegrams, dated ahead, one for each day. "Be sure to send them, faithfully, each evening," he said.

Betty giggled, but promised solemnly.

Jim and Tommy got an early start for the highland camp Jim had mentioned as their future base of operations. Tommy was so exhausted getting into the new outfit his mother had bought for him for his wilderness roughing it that he suggested some tea before they went. Jim Ryan swallowed his impatience, and brewed the stuff.

The Ajaz left the main highway near the imposing entrance to an estate which had been the summer residence of a former ambassador to England, and began climbing a hill along a narrow dirt road. A house cat ran across the road. Tommy thought it was a lynx and remarked something about it being "real wild country," and Jim swallowed his tongue.

Stevens was astonished when he had to slip into second gear. He was indignant, a mile or two farther on, when he had to go into first The Ajaz had always taken hills on high and Stevens thought he knew the Berkshire Hills. Tommy, lulled by the motion of the lounge seat, which was padded with air cushions and hung on shock absorbers, and equipped with everything but a gyroscope, fell asleep. He did not awaken until Jim called:

"Well, here we are at the top, old top."

Tommy sat up, looked about, brushed imaginary dust from his velvet corduroy breeches, and did not know the car had been turned about and headed back toward Lenox, or that Jim had unloaded the outfit he had cached in the rumble trunk in the rear. Tommy got out. He could not see the forest for the trees. But, almost immediately his blinking eyes caught a glint of crimson, half hidden in the thicket beside the road. He walked over and grasped the stem upon which grew a red plume of berries, gave a wild yell, pulled up a long, slender stalk with flat, swordlike leaves growing from it and waved it triumphantly.

"I've found it!" he cried. "I've got it already. *Panax aralyceum!*"

Jim made a signal to Stevens, which the chauffeur comprehended, from pre-

vious instructions. He got into his seat and drove the car back down the hill.

Jim strolled over and took the plant from Tommy's hand, looked at it, and flung it away.

"That," he said, "doesn't even look like it. That's nightshade. There's another variety of it known as deadly nightshade. You've got to be more careful."

Tommy turned pale. He sat down, heavily, on the ground—and rose as if he had been thrust up by a giant spring. He had sat on a ripe thistle. For a long time he pulled outward on the seat of his trousers, muttering something about barbed wire.

Jim loaded himself up like a pack mule. A heavy canvas pack sack hung to his hips from a trumpline, on top of the pack balanced a bed roll and the small silk tent he had brought. An ax hung from his belt, two skillets dangled against a trench knife. A small-bore shotgun stood against a tree, and a fishing pole lay beside it.

"Can you manage the gun and pole?" inquired Jim.

"Wh—where's Stevens?" gasped Tommy, seeing Jim in his disguise for the first time. "Has the car broken down?"

"I sent Stevens back to the hotel," Jim explained. "I just discovered that I left the tea and the brown jug in the room. We've got to walk to the camping place."

"How—how far is it?" Tommy stammered. "You mean to say you left the *panax* juice?"

"I'm afraid it's gone beyond recovery, too," Jim said regretfully. "Our suite was to be occupied immediately. We've got to find some *panax* up here or go without it."

Tommy stared, gulped, and in a sort of daze, picked up the gun and pole, shouldering the former in an absent-minded army fashion, and followed Jim along a faint path into the woods. He was so occupied picking up his feet and putting them down that he walked half a mile without realizing it. Jim halted and eased his burden against a tree. Tommy wanted to sit down but didn't feel like it.

"Did you find any more—nightshade?" inquired Jim dryly.

"You mean *panax?* No, I—I forgot to look for it. Say, look here! Where are we going? We've already traveled miles and miles and haven't seen a human footprint, and it's getting wilder and wilder. Is this a short cut to Highland Camp?"

"Keep looking for *panax,*" Jim admonished, lunging into his load. "No, this isn't exactly a short cut," he added, mumbling, and added, under his breath, "It's a short cut to health, old son."

Tommy was too utterly flabbergasted to talk. Besides, he had begun to feel weak. Perspiration broke out on him and he could feel his heart pounding on his ribs. He remembered the possibility of an open valve and imagined he heard it fluttering. His throat grew dry. His knees wabbled.

It was noon; and Tommy had eaten one slice of dry toast and an orange for breakfast.

Another half mile and Jim pushed through a thick hedge of bushes and came out into a grassy clearing studded with gnarled apple trees, the ground beneath them yellow and red with fallen fruit. A broken-down rail fence appeared at one side, a stone wall ran along the other. Jim walked to the center of the clearing, dumped everything and sat and watched Tommy stagger up, tripping in the long grass. His face was purple, his eyes bulged and he sank down, on one hip, gingerly, looking about for barbed wire, so out of breath he was speechless. He only shook his head and made feeble

motions with the hands. The last half mile had been steadily, if gradually, up.

Jim began unfurling the tent. He had it half set up when Tommy got his breath and inquired:

"How much—farther—is it—to Highland Camp?"

"We've made it, old son. This is it. Isn't it a dandy?" Jim answered enthusiastically.

Tommy placed a trembling hand on his brow and peered about the old orchard.

"But, I say, Jim, are you sure you know the Berkshires?" he asked doubtfully.

"I'll say I do," Jim responded emphatically. "I've hunted in 'em, fished in 'em, trailed through 'em. I've crossed 'em from high peak to highest peak with a party operating for the United States Geological Survey. I know 'em so well that I can even relate the history of our camp site. This is all that remains of the ancient home of a Revolutionary soldier who was paid for his services in making the world safe for Whigs as well as Tories by receiving a land grant on top of this mountain, ten miles from the nearest village."

Tommy lay down on his back in the grass. He moaned weakly.

"I thought so," he said. "We're lost. We can't find Highland Camp. We're lost in the wilds."

"I said," Jim remarked, in a loud, clear tone, "that this is our highland camp, and it is—number one. To-morrow we'll be several miles higher. What will you have for lunch? Ham and eggs or bacon and eggs?"

Tommy swallowed with difficulty.

"I can't eat a thing," he declared, "I'm too thirsty. Where," he demanded wildly, sitting up, "shall we get anything to drink? Did you forget the thermal pack?"

"I did," Jim responded indifferently. "But there is a spring over at the end of that stone wall, you'll find. There's a bucket. Trot over and get it full of water, while I build a fire. And don't forget to keep your eyes open for *panax*"

Whether in desperation for a drink or the thought of discovering the precious plant and getting out of the wilds, Tommy managed to get to his feet and tottered to the stone wall, supporting himself as he followed it to the end and found the spring. His first bucket of water was full of leaves and sticks and mud. He could not drink it. He waited for the pool to clear and dipped more carefully. He tasted it. It was cold and wet. He took a second draft. Looking up from the bucket's rim his eye lighted on an umbrella-shaped plant with leaves turning yellowish—leaves in groups of five, sharp-tapering, heart-shaped—and with a cluster of dark-red berries.

He upset the bucket as he dove for it, with a hoarse cry. The stalk resisted as he tugged at it. He remembered. It was the *root* he wanted. He got a sharp stick and dug about the tough, whitish root like a puppy, and with a final tug, broke it off and fell backward into cold, wet muck. He scarcely noticed it.

"This," he declared, sniffing at the root, "this is surely *panax arnica.*"

He bit at it, and a cunning grin came on his face. It was sweetish, bitter, aromatic. With his knowing smile working, he marched back to the camp site, where Jim was lighting a fire, and tossed the plant to his friend.

"How about that?" he demanded.

Jim took it, looked at the leaves, smelled of it and smiled.

"All right," he said, "if you *like* sarsaparilla. Where is the water?"

"Sarsaparilla! I hate it. I—I was sure it was *panax arica.*"

He went back and got the bucket of water. On his return, he ate four eggs and two large slices of ham, as well as half the loaf of spider bread Jim had baked by the fire. He was very careful not to take more than his share.

"Pretty soon," Jim apologized, "we'll have more to eat. Fresh trout and roast rabbit."

But Tommy had fallen asleep on the grass.

Jim took the fishpole, slung the light gun over his shoulder, and went down the hill into the woods. He did not even look for *panax;* he looked for a pool, in the brook of which their tiny spring was one feeder, dug some fish-worms from beneath a rotten log, and fished patiently for two hours.

The trout were ravenous. They had climbed upstream, since they were fry, to an altitude of six or seven hundred feet above river level, and they were small, but food for angels. Jim kicked up a cottontail near the edge of the orchard and shot it through its head.

Tommy slept on. Jim kicked him on the sole of his shoe.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, as he wakened. "Has Stevens got back with the tea?"

"Not yet. Probably he discovered it was gone and drove down to get some more from Doctor Fan Ch'hi. Look at these little beauties." He exhibited fifteen trout, which might have been of legal size.

"Where did you buy the smelt?" inquired Tommy. "Oh, did you find any *panax?*"

"I hooked these trout with a barbed instrument on the end of a stout cord attached to a steel rod," Jim explained patiently. "No, I found no *panax.* Now, while I dress these fish and fry this rabbit, you go and chop up some nice dry poplar, over in that grove by the rail fence, and I'll grease the frying pan. You use the ax and I'll use the pan; that's all the *panax* we'll have today, I guess. Or have you found some?"

"I—er—I must have overslept my afternoon nap," Tommy yawned. "I'll go and find some *panax* right away. I feel low. One of my sinking spells coming on. I've overdone. It's a wonder I'm not dead."

"Here! Take the ax with you!" Jim reminded him, as he began to stroll away empty-handed. "No fire without wood, no food without fire."

Tommy gave Jim a sickly look, but picked up the ax and went his way. He returned with three small sticks of rotten wood clasped to his breast and in one hand a long stem with a whorl of large red berries dangling from its tip.

"This grew on a sort of tree," he explained doubtfully. "I was wondering if by any chance, that *panax* might grow to be a tree in this altitude and climate."

"Not this season," Jim replied. "That's a handsome cluster of mountain-ash berries you have. Give me that wood, while I build a blazing bonfire with it. And the water bucket's empty."

Tommy was thirsty again. He went and got some water.

Jim produced some dry, sound wood from beneath a blanket where he had hidden it, baked bannock, fried the fish with bacon, brewed strong coffee, punched a hole in a can of condensed milk with his trench knife, and served a supper, of which Tommy ate exactly one half.

After the meal, Jim tossed Tommy a cigarette. Tommy lighted it, puffed at it, leaned back against an apple-tree stump and remarked dryly:

"Then there isn't any Highland Camp?"

"This is it," Jim persisted, grinning. "Like it?"

"If it were piped for water and had a supply of cut wood it might be made comfortable," Tommy said. "I suppose

you made up that story about Highland Camp for mother's benefit."

"If your mother accidentally got hold of a booklet advertising a dude ranch down in Connecticut, and took two and two and made ten, that's not my story," Jim replied. "This is high land and it's a camp. We came up here to find *panax*. It's a life or death matter for you, old top. Doctor Fan Ch'hi told me, in private. Didn't want to frighten you. There's *panax* in these hills, boy! Somewhere between here and New Ashford, where Stevens will meet us with the car, we'll find it."

"How far is it to New Ashford?" queried Tommy sleepily.

"Two hours," Jim replied, speaking in motor-mile time.

Tommy was frowning at his cigarette.

"Did you give me this thing?" he demanded. "You know I never smoke."

"Then why are you smoking it?" Jim inquired.

Half an hour later Tommy roused sufficiently from a nap to ask:

"Got another cigarette?"

He missed a marvelous sunset, and he slept right through the sunrise, too; for Jim carried him into the tent and laid him on the air mattress he had brought as a concession to comfort for the tenderfoot. Tommy did not awaken until Jim had taken the tent down from over him and was frying bacon within five feet of his nose.

"I have a frightful, gnawing pain at the pit of my stomach," he said, as his first conscious remark.

He ate, and the pain disappeared.

Then Jim began to load up.

"I thought this was to be our base of operations," Tommy objected. "Why are we leaving it—or rather, taking it up and walking with it?"

"You operated," Jim reminded him, as he loaded the tent on Tommy's shoulders and handed him the gun and rod, "and you found sarsaparilla and mountain ash. Doctor Fan Ch'hi told us, you know, we'd most likely find the *panax* root on the higher land, among rock ledges and hardwood timber."

By noon they were scrambling through a shadowy jumble of slippery, sharp rocks, where water dripped down, where moss grew like carpet on the rocks, and ferns and bracken thrust out of it. There was, at times, a sort of trail. It might have been made, Tommy observed, querulously, by a one-legged man. He walked bent over, from the weight of the tent, and because he was searching every foot of the ground, as he went, for *panax*.

"Say!" he exclaimed, suddenly, as Jim halted at a stream for a drink and began to dig for worms. "Haven't we been walking for more than two hours?"

"Oh, yes. It's a little longer to New Ashford, the way we are traveling," Jim replied. "We're looking for—— You didn't find any?"

"Not a berry," Tommy confessed bitterly. "I don't believe there is any in this country."

Nevertheless, instead of sitting or lying down while Jim fished, Tommy scoured the slippery rocks and climbed up and down seeking shining red berries on a long terminal stalk—and found them, only to discover they were spikenard—false Solomon's seal—or sarsaparilla—wild or false sarsaparilla—and half a dozen other plants, with and without berries, which resembled the verbal and painted pictures.

He ate trout for lunch that day as if he had never tasted any before. He drank quantities of water. Jim allowed him two hours of sleep after lunch, then roused him, to stumble on.

At four o'clock they pitched camp, Jim remarking that they had traveled so slowly they could not hope to reach New Ashford that day. Tommy didn't care. He was past caring.

However, he sat up and ate roast

rabbit, basted with bacon fat, stuffed with bannock, wild sage and chopped ham.

That evening Betty Harris wired to Mrs. Smythe-Severn:

Tommy is responding nobly to treatment at Highland Camp. Appetite improved. Sleeps very well. BETTY AND JIM.

This was number two of the prepared bulletins.

The next night it rained. Betty sent number three:

This high, dry altitude is doing wonders for Tommy. Hope to begin the *panax araliaceæ* treatment soon.

It was on the fifth day, late in the afternoon, that Tommy found a genuine specimen of the *panax,* beautiful, waxen-leaved plant with a fistlike cluster of tear-drop-shaped berries. He was carrying the ax, pole, gun, tent and frying pans. He ruined the edge of the ax, his finger nails, the crystal of his watch, his velvet corduroy trousers, and brought to Jim a piece of root which looked as if it was a doll made out of peanuts.

"Well, that's pretty good!" Jim complimented him. "It ought to weigh almost an ounce."

"Now," said Tommy, with a hint of blood in his eye, "we can make straight for New Ashford and go home and have Doctor Fan Ch'hi make some tea."

"Why, that root will only make about one dose!" exclaimed Jim. "Didn't you look for any more where you found this?"

"More? One dose?" Tommy gulped, blinked and swallowed. "I—I——"

"Oh, no, no, no!" cried Jim wearily. "You've got to have at least one pound."

Tommy's face grew grim. Jim offered to lend him a kettle to boil the root in; but he refused. He thrust it in his shirt and went looking for more. He found a single root, just at dark.

They spent ten days traveling the hilltops, descending now and then to explore ledges, to hunt for a stream, to roam the hardwood groves. They ate a little wild game, much bacon, ham, dried beef, marmelade, bannock, graham crackers, and chocolate. One, two, three at a time, Tommy collected roots of the magic *panax.* He became able to distinguish at a glance between the bright red berries of the spikenard and the reddish-brown of the sarsaparilla, and to tell them both from the *panax* seeds. He found *panax* with and without berries, its leaves heart-shaped, pear-shaped and shapeless. The nights grew cold. It was September. Tommy's original handsome outfit was riddled to shreds. He wore an extra pair of woolen trousers loaned him by Jim Ryan, and an old sleeveless sweater. He was sunburned, wind-burned, footsore, bruised, cut, scratched and ruddy.

Blood pressure greatly improved. Heart action stronger. Eating much better. Kindly inform Doctor Fan Ch'hi *panax* successful.

This was bulletin number eight from the dwindling sheaf Jim had handed to Betty, and which winged its way to Mrs. Smythe-Severn in New York.

Jim slipped away from camp one night, to a village at the foot of the mountain where they were bivouacked, and patronized a grocery store and meat market. Game and fish were scarce. If Tommy noticed the extra weight of his pack, next day, he said nothing. He had concentrated every muscle, nerve and thought upon the hunt for *panax.* He estimated he had about ten ounces of the root. He had five different types of bambinos, with one or two legs or arms. The little manikins fascinated him. He fingered them, counted them, weighed them and tucked them away in his shirt, three or four times a day.

They had come along the summits of the Taconic Range of hills, from Lenox

Mountain to the northern end, where a valley cut across, beyond which rose the foothills of Greylock, highest point in the Berkshires. Tommy regarded the steep height with speculative eyes—also, with appreciative eyes; for he was awake at sunrise, now, and saw the peak appear through morning mists, one hump at a time, and turn gray, purple, lavender, green and blue before his eyes. The sunsets blazed beyond the distant Catskills and gave them a gleam, now and then, of the Hudson. But his eyes were peeled for berries, red berries on a single stem growing out of a five-leaved cluster of waxen leaves just turning from green to light yellow.

He ate trout, rabbit, squirrel, partridge, some fresh young beef which Jim called venison, berries, mushrooms, nuts and apples. He drank gallons of spring, brook and swamp water—cold, hot and warm. He walked up and down steep hills twenty miles a day.

Against his bosom he bore ten ounces of the root of the elixir of life. A wild cat could not have torn it from him. It was life or death—and he would have died in the mountains before giving up an ounce of the precious stuff.

Jim announced, on the evening of the ninth day, that to-morrow, they would make a more or less permanent camp; because, he said, they had reached the heart of the *panax* country and must find it about here or give it up. He joined with Tommy in the search. It was late the second day when they found sign of it—and only discovered, when they began digging, that some one had been in the *panax* pasture ahead of them, dug the roots, thrust the stems in the ground again, planted the berries, and passed on.

Tommy flew into a rare rage. That night Betty sent a telegram:

> Tommy ran a slight temperature to-day. Is better to-night, sleeping soundly. You won't know him when you see him.

Jim laughed out loud, as he lay down to sleep that night, and told Tommy he had just thought of a joke he had forgotten. Jim had just recalled the text of number eleven bulletin.

Tommy was up before Jim and came back just as the coffee was boiling, with a handful of the rare roots. When Jim saw him coming he threw four more slices of bacon in the pan and opened a can of baked beans.

"How far is it, now, to New Ashford?" Tommy mumbled, through a mouthful.

"Two hours," Jim replied laconically.

"You're a liar."

"Two hours, walking down the mountain. Betty will be waiting there, with Stevens."

"You're a double-dyed liar. We'll make it in an hour, if you can keep up with me. I'll carry everything."

They came out at the State road, which runs from Pittsfield to Williamstown, opposite a white farmhouse which had a sign: "Tourists—Eat—Sleep." The Ajaz stood in the drive. On the front porch was Betty—and Mrs. Smythe-Severn, whom the last bulletin had alarmed.

She did not know Tommy. Betty did, but she had not expected to be crushed in the arms of a bear who wore two weeks' whiskers.

"Oh, my dear boy!" wailed Mrs. Severn, when she was introduced to the prodigal son. "We must rush right to Williamstown, at once. Doctor Fan Ch'hi is there to deliver a lecture on the influence of superstition upon the Chinese nation. Is the beard a part of the treatment at the Highland Camp?"

"Not necessarily," Jim Ryan hedged, "but you see, we've been so wrapped up in the *panax araliaceæ*——"

They got into the car, and Stevens drove them to Williamstown, his eyes sticking out like headlights. They found

Doctor Fan Ch'hi at an inn with elevator service, orchestra, dance floor, stock-market ticker, and all the other inconveniences. A hotel doorkeeper tried to halt Tommy, but Mrs. Smythe-Severn put him in his place, and he thought he had mistaken a Russian for a roughneck.

Doctor Fan Ch'hi served tea. He had his own handleless cups, spoutless pot and bottomless brown jug with him. But Tommy wanted a bath and so forth and tea was postponed. Tommy emerged from the bathroom bearing in his hands, like jewels, the little heap of gnarled roots he had taken from his shirt. He placed them before Doctor Fan Ch'hi.

"Show me how to prepare this and put some in the tea," he begged.

"Are you feeling ill?" inquired Doctor Fan Ch'hi anxiously.

Tommy stared at him, straightened, took a deep breath and said:

"I feel like a million dollars. But I must have some tea."

"Then you shall have some more of the tea," said the wise old doctor, "in which I shall sprinkle some more of the famous, prewar Chinese brandy which you liked so well at my humble home."

"Chi—nese—brandy?" gurgled Tommy. "I thought that was essence of *panax!*"

"I am distressed if you imagined so," Doctor Fan Ch'hi said, without a wrinkle in his smooth old face. "Did I convey that impression to you? I am sorry. I remember that my conversation was a trifle ambiguous. Ah, that is quite a remarkable collection you have there of *gin seng.*"

"*Gin seng?*" gasped Tommy.

"Of course you have heard of *gin seng.* That is the name which I had forgotten. I am old and my memory is——"

"Of course I have heard of *gin seng.* Is that all this is?"

"*Panax gin seng,*" a curious combination of Latin and Chinese. '*Panax*' meaning 'panacea' or 'cure-all,' and '*gin seng*' meaning 'form of a man.' A cure-all for man. You have also heard of fresh air and sunshine and out-of-door exercise, my friend? There are persons who pay much money for ultra-violet rays shot from an electrical imitation of the sun. They imagine, because it costs money, that it is better than the natural sun. My poor people in China believe that *gin seng* is a cure-all because it sometimes grows roots which are in the form of a man. It can do them no harm to believe so, provided they go out to gather it themselves. You have done so. I was relating to you, when you visited me, a legendary account of the plant. I might have told you that the legends also recount how the wolf, tiger and snake protect this miraculous plant from harm, and how the roots save themselves from capture by moving from place to place under the ground. But you would not have believed that."

"Oh, yes, I would!" Tommy exclaimed. "I know the roots move around underground. I've been chasing 'em."

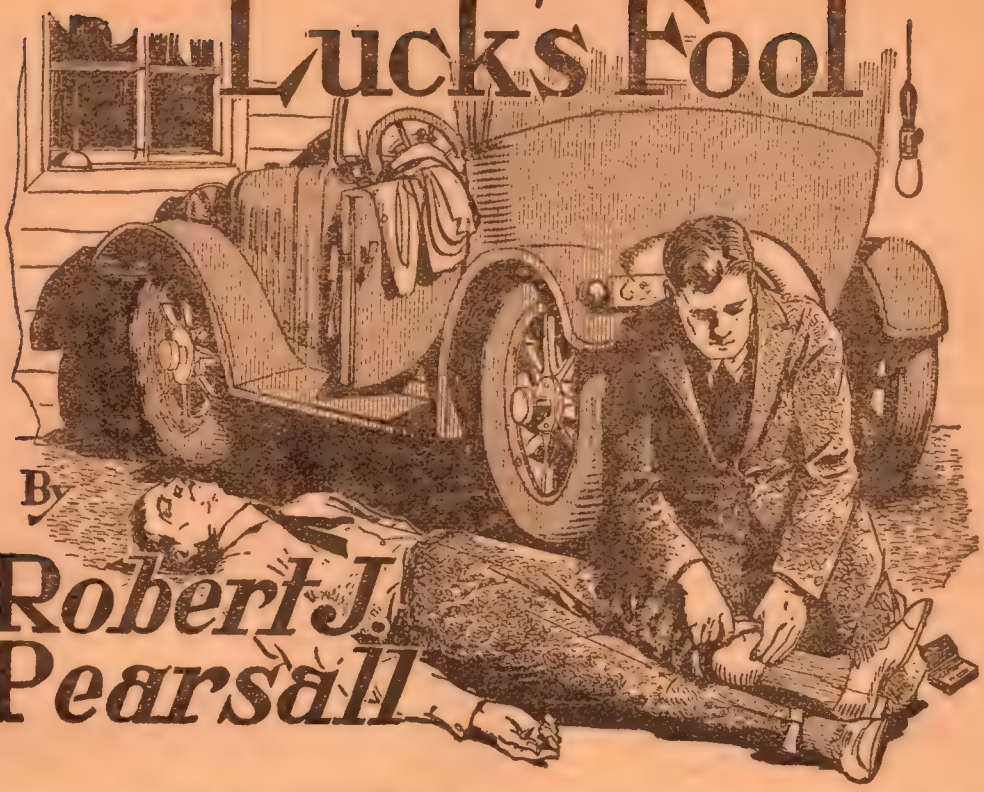
Then he laughed. He turned to Jim.

"You old bunko steerer!" he cried. "You gave me the clew when you told me to take the ax and you'd grease the pan and that would be the only *panax* we'd have that day. I was too dull to get it. I've been hating you like poison for two weeks. But now—may the Lord bless you! Where's Betty?"

When she came in, Jim Ryan turned and gazed fixedly out of the window, because he could not bear to see the look in her eyes.

"Virtue," quoted Doctor Fan Ch'hi, from an obscure disciple of Confusius who had been one of his own ancestors, "is a plant which grows with its roots in the heart, its flowers in the brain and casts forth seeds from the lips of man."

Luck's Fool



By

Robert J. Pearsall

Author of "The Past and Old Dan Pettigrew," "Esculapian Creed," Etc.

When Spanger read the morning paper he knew he had committed an entirely successful murder.

AT noon, on Wednesday, Spanger decided to kill Thorp. The rest of the day he spent forming his plan. At ten, Thursday night, he executed the plan. At half past ten he ate comfortably in his accustomed restaurant, then went to his bachelor's apartment and slept soundly.

Spanger had nothing in particular against Thorp. Thorp's only crime was in being altogether too fortunate. The killing was strictly a business necessity. Spanger's name on a line where Thorp's name belonged meant half a million to Spanger. The name, once down, could never be erased, so Spanger had erased Thorp instead. He had done it as an artist erases a figure from a picture which it mars.

In the morning, Spanger awoke at his usual time. He rose and dressed quite leisurely. Freshly shaved, smart and jaunty, he descended to the street. Of course, he was not as calm as he appeared, for he realized that this was the greatest day of his life. In a few hours he would be a wealthy man. But he was a man of habit; and besides, he had resolved to do absolutely nothing this morning contrary to his usual custom. Thus he passed two newsstands without buying, and waited till he reached the restaurant where the cashier handed him, as always, the morning paper.

Seated, he glanced over the headlines. He read half a column concerning a transatlantic flyer, and on his way

to the stock market reports, he stopped for an automobile advertisement. He would be buying an eight-cylinder car, and this one might do. But his interest was languid—his ambitions were broader than that. After he had finished with the market, he turned the pages quite slowly. The item he looked for would be an obscure one, since Thorp was an unimportant person. After a while he found it, and read it with renewed self-satisfaction.

For everything had turned out as he had planned. So far from suspicion attaching to him, suspicion attached to no one. Thorp was dead, and whether through carelessness or ignorance, obviously by his own act. Spanger smiled to think how most men would have worried, how most men would be in a flutter of nerves even now. Being sensible, Spanger never worried. Being sensible, he trusted nothing to luck, as other men did. "Luck's a fool," he often said. Luck was a fool because it favored fools, such as Thorp. Thorp had but to be born—and, presto! his life's problems were solved for him; while as for Spanger——

Laying aside the paper and attacking the grapefruit, Spanger allowed his thoughts to drift over the last six months, during which he had forced the hand of luck, with the result that luck, like a jade that yields when beaten, had turned to him at last.

It all sprang from his relations with Thorp. Spanger was Thorp's attorney —or, rather, his rent collector. Nothing more than collecting rents was in prospect. For Thorp was a near-recluse, from whom it would be wild to hope any profitable legal entanglements. A thin, pallid, soft-speaking man, whose only passion was the collection of old pottery. And utterly without ambition in a business way. Spanger had tried him out.

Spanger was a quiet man himself, who had no gift for securing big clients or profitable cases at law. But he was so ambitious that it hurt. And he had his talents. He could make money grow if he had it. He was a thinker; a Paul Pry, too—a man who could find out things.

As he had found out about Motors Special. There was a sure thing. Motors Special was going up. But you have to have money to make it. So Spanger had borrowed money. He had given as security a mortgage on a half block of unimproved B Street water front, which belonged to Thorp.

To do this, he had to have title, but that was a simple matter for a reputable attorney like Spanger to arrange. A careless witness, a hurried notary, Thorp's forged signature—that was all.

A very easy matter; and even easier to hold onto the property after he had made his gain. Another chance would come. Thorp would never look up the records; he never thought of selling. And since Spanger attended to his taxes for him, he would never know that the property was assessed in Thorp's name.

So that was all right. And better than all right, presently, when Spanger discovered that the J. K. & L. Railroad was building into the city, and that its only practicable terminus was on that hitherto-undesired half block.

Spanger calmly went over the situation. He could sell to the railroad for a fortune. His title was months old now. Everything was in proper form. Nobody but Thorp would dispute the forged signature. And he had no relatives, no heirs. His property was willed to a foundling's home. Thorp alone stood in the way of the sale. Even he would notice a depot going up on his land. The conclusion was perfectly obvious. Thorp must be removed.

Sitting now, with his usual morning cigar, Spanger reënacted mentally what he had done.

At half past nine the previous evening, he had strolled past Thorp's bungalow. The street was quiet, deserted. The bungalow was dark. The door of the cement garage at the side of the house was open. This was all as Spanger had expected. Thorp always drove in the evening. He said it helped him to sleep.

Spanger turned into the garage. He took a position just inside the door to the right, so that, half an hour later, when the machine turned into the driveway and the lights lanced into the garage, he was still in darkness.

As it came to a stop, Thorp turned off the motor. Spanger had expected him to switch off the lights, but it didn't matter. For Thorp, after climbing out of the car, bent into it again, to get something out of the rear of the tonneau. Spanger could have wished no better chance to use his cloth-wrapped blackjack.

As Spanger struck, with carefully measured force, anxious not to kill, Thorp whirled half around. Spanger wasn't sure whether he had been seen or not. The next instant Thorp was on the floor, limp and unconscious.

Spanger quickly closed the garage doors. Returning to Thorp, he felt for his pulse. Good, he was still alive. Without hesitation, for he had everything planned, he removed Thorp's coat and vest, and folded them carefully over the door of the car. He brushed off the soft felt hat, straightened it, and placed it on the seat. Lifting the seat, he selected from the tools underneath a wrench and a pair of pliers. The wrench he placed on the running board, and the pliers on the floor near Thorp's right hand. Next, he loosened Thorp's cuff links, and rolled up his sleeves. Then he produced a hypodermic syringe, pushed up the left leg of Thorp's trousers, inserted the point a little below the knee, and pressed the plunger. A single drop of blood followed when he drew the needle out. He wiped it away, and readjusted the trouser leg.

Now he raised the hood of the machine and disconnected one of the spark plugs. Leaving the hood up, he got into the seat and started the motor. It ran sweetly in spite of the broken connection. On the road, however, it would lack power. It would be natural for the driver to look for the trouble, and quite probable that he would not find it soon. So the tools near Thorp's hands were accounted for.

With the hand throttle, Spanger accelerated the motor until there was no danger of it dying. Then he left the garage, and shut the doors behind him. His work was done—well done. The deadly carbon-monoxide gas in the exhaust which strikes men down without discomfort or any kind of warning, was filling the closed garage. Thorp would be dead in a few minutes. There had been no slip up whatever.

The newspaper report was exactly what he had expected it to be. The bruise on the head was not mentioned; it had naturally been attributed to the fall. The slight prick of the hypodermic, intended to insure a sufficient period of unconsciousness, had not been noticed at all. Thorp had apparently died as others had died, from working on his running motor in a closed garage. An inquest would render a similar verdict, showing carbon monoxide the cause of death. But there would be no inquest, no inquiry, no bother at all. Spanger thought it probable he would never hear of the matter again. However, in the lobby of the Law Building, to which he went from the restaurant, he met a man who knew Thorp slightly, and knew, too, that he was Spanger's client.

"Did you read about old Thorp?" asked Wilkins.

"Yes. Too bad," said Spanger.

"Darn hard luck, that was."

"Luck's a fool," Spanner said. "But you'd hardly call that luck, would you?"

"I suppose not. To tell the truth, I hardly know what to call it."

"Why not?" Spanger glanced at Wilkins sharply.

"Well, it seems all right enough—an accident, I mean—but I happen to know that Thorp practically never monkeyed with his car. He was the same about that as he was about business—he never looked under the hood. And he wasn't careless, either. You'd never figure him for such a trick."

"No, you wouldn't. But if he'd looked under the hood oftener—well, he'd have been wiser."

"I know. But why the devil—though I know it's happened before—why should any one *close* the garage doors before monkeying with the motor?"

"I'm sure I don't know; but they do," said Spanger easily.

"And then it was funny for him to be working on it that time of night. All in all—— Well, of course it was an accident; Thorp hadn't any enemies. But it strikes me that if a man really wanted to bump somebody off, he might frame up something pretty safe with that carbon-monoxide stuff."

Spanger laughed. "You always did have an ingenious mind."

"Not so very, or I'd be better off. Speaking of that, one of the boys was saying that you've been raking in the dollars lately."

"Not yet. But maybe soon." It was as well to prepare people for what they would soon hear anyway. "You know, it takes money to make money. I got a little start a few months ago."

"Good! Well, so long."

Wilkins waved his hand carelessly, and left Spanger in front of the elevator. Spanger was glad he had met Wilkins. The conversation had given a slight fillip to Spanger's nerves. Also it had confirmed his confidence in his own coolness—not, of course, that there was anything disturbing in Wilkins' talk. Wilkins was an old busybody, who was forever building weird conjectures upon ordinary happenings. Smiling a little, Spanger entered his outer office. He had two rooms of a rather extensive suite.

"Get Merrill 6759," he ordered the stenographer, and passed into his private room.

Two minutes later he had arranged for the interview which was to bring him wealth. In half an hour the representatives of the railroad would call. Spanger knew exactly what he would get from them, and exactly what would happen afterward.

For this was only the beginning. He saw himself in a very few years one of the leaders of the city. One of the molders of business, the dispensers of favors and the reverse; one of those who made and wrecked other men's fortunes, and always improved their own. First, he would buy into the Apex Bank; he fancied himself on the board of directors. Then he would join certain clubs—the invitations would come. Those backgrounds would enable him to function properly, to use his talents.

But in the midst of these pleasant reflections, a certain uneasiness came over him. It was as though something inimical and invisible had entered the room. Justly, no doubt, he laid the feeling down to idleness. He shrugged the feeling off, lit a fresh cigar, and busied himself with some papers. When his three callers arrived, they found him slightly paler than at their last meeting, but very alert and sure of himself.

"You're a very lucky man," commented the spokesman presently. "Of course, the records don't show the price you paid for this property, but I suppose it was pretty low."

"Well, you may suppose so," smiled

Spanger, "but you might not be right. It takes money to make money nowadays."

"And brains," the other complimented him, bowing.

"Thank you!" said Spanger dryly.

"However, concerning the purchase by the railroad, we can build elsewhere, of course. There's the foot of A Street, which the Sperry people will sell us——"

"Mr. Hartwell," interrupted Spanger, with a sudden show of impatience, "what was the meaning of your former remark?"

"I don't quite understand."

"You complimented me by saying I had brains."

"Well?"

"Previously you said I was lucky. Now, I deny that. Luck's a fool. Usually it keeps company with fools. Lately I admit luck's been with me, because—well, that doesn't matter." A slightly irritated note had crept into Spanger's voice, but he suppressed it and went on steadily. "The point is, if I needed to be enlightened at this late date as to any detail concerning the value of my property to you, I should deserve to be called merely a lucky man."

The others seemed to him to be looking at him curiously. But Harwell agreed:

"I suppose the point's well taken. Well, what is your figure?"

"I'll give it only if you are empowered to close the deal immediately."

"We are."

"To the point of filling out a check."

"Well—yes, Mr. Spanger."

"Half a million, then—even. Now," Spanger held up his hand, "I know your duty to your principals, but please consider it done. Half a million; not a penny less."

"Well—let's draw up the papers."

It took some minutes to do that. Meanwhile, Spanger leaned back in his chair with every appearance of ease. But that required will power. Really, his nerves were twitching. It was merely, of course, that the fortune was so close, so unbelievably and yet surely close. For nothing could happen now. The dead did not arise. There was no reason that he should wish the walls of his office were sound proof. No one was listening beyond that closed door. Harwell was filling in the check now, whistling softly, for it was not his money.

"A witness, now," said Harwell.

A witness! Spanger was on his feet. He explained that he was going to call his stenographer. She would do as a witness. Now he dared not turn around. He would not admit to himself that what had brought him from his chair was the opening of that door of doom. But he saw his three callers staring past him. And he heard a voice that drew him, drew him around, although on weakening knees, to face that which could not be.

"Won't we do as witnesses?" smiled the man he had killed, spreading his hands toward the two policemen that flanked him in the doorway.

Spanger, staring, held to the desk behind him with both hands.

"Oh, I'm flesh and blood," drawled Thorp. "Mustn't believe all you read, you know. A false report of death's no crime if the police are with you. We wanted to know what you were up to, particularly as I hadn't a witness to what happened last night. And we thought we mightn't have to wait long."

"But how——" gasped Spanger, then stopped. If he inquired why Thorp was still alive, it would be confession.

"How did I escape? I'll tell you. Forgetfulness—yours and mine. I forgot to stop at a service station. You forgot to look in the gas tank. I guess I'm just Luck's fool."

The Last

By Fred MacIsaac

In Six Parts
Part I

Author of "The Progress of Peter

Editorial comment on a manuscript of this kind is somewhat difficult. The author's It is enough to say that this puts forth the story of a lost continent—and that, whether mensely. No further data or information is at hand, either to substantiate the claims to the reader for what he finds in it, whether a brilliant imaginative invention or

INTRODUCTION.

ALTHOUGH the world is old and has been inhabited for countless ages, we have learned very little of the nations which have had their day, of civilizations which have thrived and vanished.

It happened that the old Greeks were literary, but they were also superstitious and not too fond of truth. When they did not possess facts they fictionized and were wont to attribute to gods the deeds of men; but to them we owe most of what we know of nations which preceded and were contemporary with them.

Various waves of besotted barbarians blotted out the civilization of the Greeks and Romans and destroyed nine tenths of their writings; but enough remain to give us some idea of the magnificence of their empires. Now, suppose the Huns and Goths and Vandals had completely accomplished their work of destruction of manuscripts and monuments, that they had left nothing instead of almost nothing—would moderns credit, in such case, that the writers, painters, sculptors, architects, mathematicians, and philosophers of antinquity were great? Hardly!

Whence came the genius of the Nordics who invented the civilization of Egypt, Greece, and Asia Minor? We are told that these blue-eyed, blond-

Atlantide

Pratt," "Scum of the Sea," Etc.

own introduction to the main body of the tale is without doubt the best explanation. the reader accepts it as fact or merely as an interesting account, he will enjoy it im- of Pagneomon, the Atlantide, or to refute him. "The Last Atlantide" is submitted living fact.

haired men originated somewhere in western Siberia or eastern Russia, though nothing has been discovered in that quarter of the world to justify the belief that it was the birthplace of civilization.

It is the habit of historians to gloss over what they do not actually know, and to make vague statements instead of frank admissions of ignorance, and so they permit us to accept the theory that these blond peoples arrived at the warm shores of the Mediterranean—ignorant barbarians, who developed arts and sciences immediately upon settling there, although common sense teaches us that civilization is a plant of slow growth which could not have blossomed in a few centuries under the semitropic sun.

I, Gregory MacKenzie, have been a student of early civilizations all my long life. I have delved among Chaldean relics, poked through Egyptian tombs, puttered about the stone piles of Babylon and Nineveh, traversed the jungles of Central America, climbed the high Andes to investigate the ruins which were left there by a far more ancient race than Pizarro discovered in Peru, and studied the cuneiform of the Assyrian, the hieroglyphic of the Egyptian, the strange markings of the Maya, and other ancient methods of expressing thought in writing.

And by my labors I have made

strange discoveries. Yet the stolid and dubious graybeards who control the societies of historians and antiquarians have ignored me, failed to recognize me, refused to accept my findings, and have dubbed me unreliable. This is annoying but not important, for I worked for love and not for honors.

Now that I have made the greatest discovery of all time, have drawn from remote ages the finest human story ever set down in letters, have solved the mystery of Lost Atlantis—the origin of the Nordics—and have given to the world a solution of all that has ever puzzled it, I offer it, not to them, but to the public. Nor do I care a whit whether the wise ones accept the tale of Pagneomon, the Last Atlantide, as authentic or reject it as the work of my imagination. I know what I know.

The Greeks had a legend that there once existed a great island in the Atlantic Ocean. It had sunk beneath the sea. There civilization had been well advanced and the works of man were mighty. Plato wrote a description of that country, its laws, institutions, system of government, and religion, which was in great detail. But he failed to finish it, for a reason never explained. The information on which he based his article was meager in the extreme, and the very minuteness with which he describes Atlantis marks it as fiction, nothing more.

Perhaps he wrote of an imaginary country, such as he wished his own land to be—a Utopia. He detailed a glorified Greece, placed Greek deities in its temples and Greek ideas in the minds of its people; yet Atlantis had vanished thousands of years before Plato's Nordic ancestors settled near the Ægean Sea.

As Pagneomon reveals it, Atlantis was very different from the imaginary country of Plato, and Pagneomon makes little effort to describe Atlantis. Rather, he is absorbed in his own adventures in love and war and his miraculous escape with Arsinhœa. Yet no one can read his narrative without learning more of the character of that extinct people and their institutions than we know of many nations whose existence in Asia before Chaldea and Assyria even the antiquarians with a dozen letters after their names admit.

In translating the journal of Pagneomon, found by me upon a mass of papyrus in the interior of a great block of stone, which was split open before my eyes by a stroke of lightning in the jungle of Yucatan—a forest which had grown over the site of an ancient Quiche temple—I have tried to set it in the current English of our day, avoiding obsolete expressions where possible, eliminating the second person singular—almost extinct in modern English—and the extravagance of expression of an ancient writer, for the sake of agreeable reading.

Pagneomon's equivalent of a mile was a thousand paces, also used by the Romans, and this I have let stand; but I have substituted our own standard of measures for his own, given our names for animals and things when we have equivalents. I allowed, however, the word "buthom" to remain, since we have no bird of burden, and I certainly could not call a two-legged bird a horse. It is possible that it was a variety of ostrich, but I do not know.

For ten years I labored over the papyrus piles, fresh as the day they were hidden in the rock, covered over with an oval system of writing by some pointed instrument and a black substance not so different from modern ink. I admit I was aided by the similarity, in certain respects, of the ovals to the cuneiforms or wedge-shaped script of the Assyrians and the picture writings of the Egyptians—though the Atlantan writing is more fluent and flexible than either, and probably was the source of both.

It was by accident that I discovered the key, and at the end of another year I was able to translate the story of a race which, I estimate, was obliterated at least five thousand years before Christ. The papyrus, hermetically sealed, and my grammar of the beautiful lost language, are locked in the vault of my bank in London.

But the story wishes to be told, and I have been thrilled and enthralled in the labor of translation. After my death the savants may see my proofs and learn whether the saga of Pagneomon is fact or fiction.

CHAPTER I.

THE LOST ATLANTIS.

I, PAGNEOMON, being nearly one hundred years old, king of the country of Meræus, which lies between the two oceans, propose to set down in my mother tongue the tale of my youth, more to live again in the arms of Arsinhœa, the beautiful and my queen, dead these thirty years, than to tell of the fate of mighty Atlantis, which now lies a mile deep under the great sea because of destruction brought upon her by the uncontrollable forces of nature.

I have never learned to write the language of this new country of which I am king; it is a barbaric system incapable of artistic expression, and since Atlantis is lost and all her people drowned, it is unlikely that any will ever be able to read the romance of a great king. Little I reck; I write to while away the lonely hours as I wait for the summons from the supreme God of all.

When I was born to Teforn, Prince of Azoria, of his favorite wife, Nesmia, in his palace on the sea wall in the great city of Luth, my country was already two thousand years old. Ages before, Luth had been situated upon a great plateau in the center of Atlantis, but, by some strange freak of the gods, the sea had crept over a great part of the nation and our plateau was become an island some fifty thousand paces wide by two hundred thousand paces long.

At the western end of the island the land rose gradually till it formed a high mountain, from the top of which smoke issued always, and very often during the ages fire came forth and red-hot stones were hurled a great distance.

Many cities were destroyed, the great agricultural lands were inundated, and the congestion of population upon the plain of Luth was terrific, more than twice as many people as our shrunken country could feed. Egis, who was the great king in those days, decreed that a census should be taken, and it was found that there were crowded upon the plateau some five million men, women and children, most of them in dire want.

After much thought, Egis decided that two thirds of these must die that the other third might live, and decreed that there should be a slaughter of the surplus population, which should begin in his own palace with his own sons.

But Garo, his second son, knowing that he would be condemned to death in any case, conspired against his father and brothers and, supported by the army, slew them and gained the crown.

As the situation continued to grow worse, Garo was forced to admit his murdered father's wisdom, but he dared not put the terrible edict into effect. Instead, he decreed a great exodus. Two thirds of the population must take ship and sail for other lands, there to establish themselves by their swords, and those who must go would be chosen by lot, without fear or favor.

In the past Atlantis had not been a maritime nation, although she was set in the middle of the Great Sea, but the wise men knew well that a few weeks' rowing to the eastward was a very

great continent, inhabited only by miserable, undersized creatures with black hair and yellow skins, ignorant of the art of war, living wretchedly and too stupid to develop the rich territory in which they resided.

What chance had such races of people against our stalwart, golden-haired warriors with their long swords, their sharp, brazen javelins, and their perfectly protecting armor. The great danger was the sea, for frightful storms arose frequently upon our ocean which sank the stoutest ships, and our people feared the sea. They did not wish to leave their homeland, and only by force were they driven into ships.

The exodus continued for ten years, during which more than two and a half million Atlantides were carried away in some ten thousand ships, being dispatched at long intervals, lest, uniting somewhere, they might descend upon Atlantis in great force and conquer it. The king decreed that any exiles who dared to return should be dispatched as soon as they set their feet on shore. Thus it was ages before we learned of the fate of our expatriates.

It is evident that by far the greater part of them perished at sea, and those who finally reached land were driven millions of paces to the north and east, gripped by powerful currents, finally to be flung ashore in a cold, barbaric country where vast numbers of them died of exposure.

We know now that certain bands finally won through and settled in warmer, more friendly lands,* where they set up new nations and brought the blessings of civilization to the benighted inhabitants; but there has been little communication between our remote, involuntary colonists and the mother land. Now, of course, the mother land is no more.

Reduced to less than half its former population, Atlantis prospered again. But a hundred years later overpopulation once more became a menace when Gruth, our most enlightened king, solved the problem forever in a very different way. For ages we had known that a mighty force could be obtained by heating water until it turned into vapor, and by means of engines moved by vapor.

He proposed the reclaiming from the sea of part of our lost provinces. He began the construction of a series of great walls extending out into the ocean around our island like great spokes from the hub of a wheel to a distance of five thousand paces.

Then connecting walls were built like the rim of a wheel, leaving openings through which the sea might move until all was ready. Then, by means of our mighty engines, utilizing the giant force of vapor, the sea water was forced out through the openings in the walls and the gates sealed so that it might enter no more. These walls extended all around Atlantis, save at the west, in the vicinity of the burning mountain.

Such a gigantic work was not to be accomplished in one reign; in fact, it was more than a hundred years before the system of land reclaiming was finished. But, as one section after another of sea bottom was regained, people settled upon it, and soon began to produce fine crops of corn.

The outer walls were of great thickness, so wide that one hundred men could march abreast upon the top, while at the bottom the width had spread to triple this space. Thus the ocean, try as it would, was rarely able to make a breach. History records that two or

*(Note: Perhaps Pagneomon has cleared up the mystery of the origin of the Nordics. Probably these blond exiles landed on the German or Scandinavian coasts and moved slowly eastward to the borders of Asia, then swung south and emerged upon the shores of the Mediterranean, a migration which may have lasted for four or five hundred years.)

three times, during tremendous storms, the sea did break through the wall; but, because of the rim-and-spoke construction of the works, only a small section of the total reclaimed area was inundated.

By means of this marvelous engineering work the fertile territory of Atlantis was doubled, and further increase in population was then curbed by the law of King Morthe that no wife should bring forth more than two children, a boy and a girl. Excess children were sent at once to the temple of Magor for sacrificial purposes. But after the great civil war, about three centuries before my birth, the law of King Morthe was suspended, and families were urged to produce many children.

At the time of my birth the city of Luth had spread until it and its suburbs occupied a tenth of the plateau, but the lowlands under the sea walls were restricted entirely to farming. However, it was permitted to construct houses upon the tops of the great sea walls, and the home of my father was built right out above the ocean. It was a beautiful place.

My early recollections are of wonder at seeing the blue sea slapping at the outer edge of the wall, the height of two men below the terrace of our home, while on the other side I looked down a great distance upon the tops of trees and the roofs of farmhouses, and herds of cattle which seemed no larger than so many ants grazing upon bright-green fields, and beyond an ocean of waving corn.

A strange thing had occurred ten years before my birth—the sinking of the plateau of Luth, which, without destroying more than a few hundred buildings, dropped nearly to the level of the surrounding sea bottom. Had it not been for the foresight of our ancient kings in constructing the vast circle of ocean walls, what was left of Atlantis would have been buried at that time.

There were astrologers who predicted that our fate was inevitable, that some time in the future the angry sea would rise over our walls, and that that would end all things; but nobody paid any attention to them.

In this, my adopted country, it is necessary to go about almost unclad because of excessive heat, and the sun in midday is deadly; but the climate of Atlantis was not like this. The wind there was always balmy, no matter how warm might be the rays of the sun; the sea air tempered them to a pleasant degree and the nights were cool and delightful, so that one slept always under woolens.

It was well to cover the body during the day, and the making of garments was a great industry in Luth, where we had craftsmen who were able to dye clothes in various shades of red, yellow, blue, green, and purple—an art which I would have introduced here, but alas! I did not remember the secrets of the dyers.

Like all Atlantide families my parents had but two children, myself and a younger sister, and upon us they lavished the luxuries their wealth permitted. My education was the best the nation afforded. I was taught to read and write, to cipher, and to know the history of my country. At a very early age I was placed in the hands of a captain who taught the use of the sword, the javelin, and how to protect my body with the heavy bronze shield, and I learned to keep my seat upon the buthom.

These great birds were trained to war. Having no wings, they could not fly away, and they were so strong that they could carry a very heavy, fully armed soldier upon their backs ten times as fast as a man could run. They were ugly creatures, having a very long neck, a thick, solid body, and long, thin

legs, which were so powerful that the kick of a buthom would kill a human being, and in war they bit fiercely with their strong beaks.

His majesty kept ten thousand trained buthoms in the royal depots, and ten thousand men, mounted upon them, could overthrow a hundred thousand footmen. Had I five hundred of these marvelous birds in this country, I could have conquered all the savage tribes which inhabit the continent.

We had heard rumors that our colonists in Eastern lands had learned to ride to war upon a four-legged animal, the name of which I never knew. However, I doubt if such mounts were as efficient as our buthoms, which could cover more ground in a given time than any four-footed beast in the world.

My father owned a vast tract of land upon the old sea bottom inside the wall near our house, and a flight of stairs led down from the wall upon our farm country. As a child I counted the steps, and there were more than five hundred of them—from which you may calculate the height of the sea wall.

We had many servants, and the sole duty of several was to watch the wall night and day, lest the sea find a crevice through which it might trickle. Neglected leaks of this sort had been the cause of several catastrophes in ages past, and it was the law that every land owner must watch his own section of the wall.

I used to ride my buthom at will over the bottom lands, delighting in the reverence paid me by the serfs who tilled the soil. They lived in queer, conical houses of dried mud and pebbles, miserable creatures, mostly unclad and usually starving because they were forbidden to take for their own use anything they produced on the land.

After our agents had received from them their products, a tenth part of it was awarded them. Should they fail to satisfy my father's agents that they were working diligently, they were whipped, and for persistent laziness they were thrown off the sea wall, where the ferocious monsters of the ocean made short work of them.

Though my palace in this country is not uncomfortable, I often sigh for the luxury of Atlantis, and I can shut my eyes and see again the house where I was born. It was a terraced tower, six stories high, built of stone held in place by a certain sticky substance, and whitened artificially. The walls of the chambers were hung with beautifully dyed woolens; the floors were soft with skins of beasts, most of them of great age and priceless, for long-haired beasts were no longer found in Atlantis. The couches were covered with soft cushions, stuffed with the feathers of geese and other birds, and there were pictures depicting scenes from life so ingeniously that it was hard to believe they were made with paints upon cloth.

I was fifteen years old before I was permitted to visit the great city of Luth, and you may be sure I was astounded by the wonders that I looked upon. Although we had no foreign enemies, there were often rebellions in the land, mostly due to various members of the royal family who desired to grasp the throne, and the city was protected by high walls and patrolled night and day by soldiers in bright armor, who carried long spears.

No one was permitted to enter or leave the city without identifying himself to the officers on duty, and there was always a long line of nobles and merchants waiting to enter and another long line eager to secure permission to depart. The city had outgrown the walls long ago, and you traveled for a long time through busy roads lined with dwelling houses before you reached the gate of the city proper. Nevertheless, vigilance was always maintained at the portals.

The last census before the catastro-

phe showed that nearly six hundred thousand persons lived in the city proper, some three hundred thousand in the suburbs which dotted the plain of Luth, and that the country folk numbered another million. Of these two million people only about four hundred thousand were freemen; these were allowed to keep all they earned, and were unmolested by the tax collectors of the king. The only way a slave could become a freeman was by distinguishing himself in battle—a shrewd method of inducing slaves to fight more heroically than their masters. Children of slaves were branded with the sign of their master, a system which avoided all arguments.

CHAPTER II.

THE SMALL PRINCESS.

OLD as I am, I thrill when I remember the great city as it burst upon me. From the gate to the palace of the king stretched a broad stone road, as straight as a spear and more than two thousand paces long. It was wide enough to permit carts to pass and it teemed with ox wagons and buthom riders.

The houses were built in solid blocks, and above the first story was a continuous terrace used by pedestrians. At every intersecting street footbridges crossed the vehicle ways, and bridges also crossed the main avenue at frequent intervals. There were many shops which had entrances below for persons descending from vehicles or buthoms and doorways in the second stories for persons on foot.

Above the second stories were similar terraces, which were not intended for passage but as vantage points for those who resided within to post themselves to observe what passed below. Many of these buildings were of great age, and by no means white and clean looking like my father's palace; they were the abodes of people of small means.

I rode my own small buthom very proudly beside my father, escorted by twenty of our servants, carrying swords and spears, on household buthoms. Despite the king's police, there was always danger in the streets from robbers and murderers.

From my seat I could see the multitude of pedestrians upon the terraced sidewalks, and I peered with great interest into their faces. At home I knew only my family, our servants, and the ruffians of the reclaimed sea bottom. These persons represented a new class, the townsmen and common people, less lowly than the farmers but far from being well to do. I noted, however, that even the slaves were better clad and better fed than the tillers of the soil.

We were bound for the palace of my father's brother, who was a great lord in the city and had the ear of King Horthe himself, to return a visit he had paid us the previous year, and to reach his house it was necessary for us to circle the royal palace.

We could plainly see the great white house of the king from the moment we passed the gate, for it seemed to block the far end of the avenue, rising in tiers to an enormous height. It was circular in shape, and the sunlight, shining upon its windows, was reflected back as if it struck the surface of great diamonds. My father explained that the reflection was caused by the rays of light hitting a thin, transparent substance called "izzom," manufactured by the king's scientists from a certain kind of sand, which kept out the dust and the cool air, yet permitted those within to see through the window openings as if they were not obstructed. The use of izzom was prohibited to all subjects, but it was used in the windows of the upper tiers of the palace.

When we finally emerged from the

avenue, we found ourselves in a vast, circular, open space fully five hundred paces wide, and we were compelled to ride completely around this great space to reach the avenue on the farther side upon which my uncle dwelt. The palace was fully three hundred paces in diameter in its lowest tier, and was surrounded by a wall five times the height of a man, at a distance of several hundred paces from the main building.

My father explained that all buildings within five hundred paces of the wall had been leveled ages ago, which made it impossible for the king's enemies to approach the palace without being sighted far away. The strongest archer could not send an arrow half the distance from the nearest houses to the wall, and rebels would have to show themselves in the open while the loyal troops were shielded by the ramparts.

"It is obvious that no enemy can ever reach our king," I said enthusiastically; but my father laughed dryly.

"Sometimes our worst enemies are those we are nourishing in our bosom," he replied.

In the square a large body of royal infantry were marching, and a brave sight they made as they passed, fully fifty men abreast, with spears held high, their points sparkling in the sunlight, their polished shields glittering, and the red cock feathers of the king waving above their helmets. I counted them, and there were a hundred files of men, which meant that there were full five thousand in the array.

" 'Tis but a twentieth of the standing army of Atlantis," my father explained; "though, with no foreign foe, 'tis a pity three quarters of them are not laboring on the sea bottoms."

I have not spoken to you of my father's appearance. In his youth he was considered the most beautiful man in Atlantis. Rumor said that the queen had loved him, that he had repulsed her, and that only her untimely death had saved him from destruction by her jealous anger.

As we rode that day, he was still a very handsome man, not more than forty years of age, straight as a javelin, his hair jet black—most of our people, like myself, were blond. The two-handed sword which he carried suspended from his right shoulder was the heaviest in the kingdom.

In olden times our nobles always fought with two-handed swords of that weight, but peace—which had lasted a hundred years—luxury, much wine drinking, and sloth had weakened our aristocracy, who abandoned the great sword for a short, light weapon wielded by the right hand.

"Does not his majesty need a great army to prevent the revolt of the slaves and the farmers of the sea lands?" I asked.

"Think not so, my lad. A few thousand nobles on their birds could suppress any domestic rebellion with the greatest ease. But a revolt of the army might change the dynasty. I have told the king so; but he laughs—he laughs easily."

We rode on around the great circle until we reached the opposite side. Then we entered a wide avenue, proceeded down it a short distance, turned in through a gate, and dismounted in the courtyard of my uncle's residence.

Although the portal through which we passed seemed to lead directly into a terraced building like the other houses of the city—and above our heads we heard the tramp of the pedestrians—this outer house was but the residence of the warden. Beyond was a paved yard a hundred paces wide, where many buthoms stood at hitching posts, and half a dozen carts, to which were harnessed horned cattle, were drawn up in a line.

My uncle advanced to greet us, fol-

lowed by his lady and his son and daughter. Although I was a young boy and my prejudices were not important, I disliked, even then, my mother's brother, perhaps because he was the antithesis of my father, whom I considered the epitome of all masculine virtue. Uncle Gathor was small and lean and had been red of hair, but most of his hair had worn off and his bare crown glistened in the sunlight beneath its coating of oil.

He used many ointments and perfumes; his robe was of many colors, and he clanked with bracelets and anklets. Beneath his rather prominent nose grew a reddish mustache which bristled like the whiskers of a cat, and his eyes were small, set close together, and a very light blue. Too much wine had caused the whites of his eyes to be bloodshot. Uncle Gathor was an example of the effeteness of the present age, and the chief of a band of men who encouraged his majesty in all sorts of excesses.

"Thrice welcome, brother-in-law and nephew mine, whom I have not seen for many years!" he exclaimed in a thin, reedy voice which annoyed me. "Embrace me, brother and brave boy, and greet your aunt and cousins."

My aunt stepped forward, and I regarded her with surprise, for it was our first meeting. She was a tall woman, half a head higher than her husband, and a strange woman, very beautiful in a weird fashion. Her black hair fell like a waterfall of glistening jet almost to her ankles. A red robe set off her dark beauty. Her great black eyes seemed incredibly wise.

From my mother I had learned that Aunt Fedrath was not a native of Atlantis, that many years before a curiously shaped vessel had been seen bobbing on the waves off the sea wall to the south, which inevitably would have been crushed against the rock barrier had not one of our fishermen sallied forth from a near-by port and towed it into harbor. In this vessel were two dead men, jet black, a white woman, quite dead, and a little girl of rare beauty but of dark coloring, who could not have been more than three or four years. She babbled in an unknown tongue.

She was uninjured by her voyage, and so lovely that the queen received her into her quarters and brought her up as if she were her daughter. That little girl was my Aunt Fedrath.

Father had told me that Aunt Fedrath had uncanny gifts, one of which was foretelling the future. He had not told me that she was given in marriage against her will to Uncle Gathor, by special favor of the king.

Child as I was, I disapproved of her embrace of welcome for my father. Methought she held her lips against his much too long; but me she favored with a cold caress upon the cheek.

Both my girl and boy cousins had visited us upon the sea wall and were good friends of mine. Gella, the girl, was red of hair like her father and covered with brown marks of the sun upon her white face and shoulders. Baruth, the boy, who was a year younger than myself, was strong and good natured, and his hair was a dark brown and his eyes brown, instead of the blue of Atlantis. We passed arms about each other's waist, while they demanded news of my journey. And then I saw a very small girl, who stood aloof, holding herself with great hauteur and wearing an expression of something like indignation.

Baruth followed my eyes and laughed.

"By the great Garthe, if we have not committed lese majesty!" he exclaimed. "We have not led you to pay obeisance to the Princess Arsinhœa."

"That infant a princess?" I scoffed. But while I spoke my aunt was leading my father to the small one, and I

was astonished to see him drop upon both knees, take the tiny palm of the child, and touch it with his lips.

"The king's daughter, no less," said Gella. "She condescends to visit with us to-day."

"But she looks just like an ordinary little girl," I protested. Until now I had never set eyes upon royalty, and in my ignorance had supposed they differed from the rest of us—perhaps had four arms or two heads, I did not know.

"Come," said Baruth. "You also must bend the knee."

"I shall not!" I retorted. "I am as loyal to the royal family as any in Atlantis, but I do not bend the knee to a chit of a girl."

"You are better, perhaps, than your father, Teforn, Prince of Azoria," sneered Baruth.

"He is his own master, so am I."

Gella took my right arm and Baruth my left, and they dragged me to the royal presence.

Arsinhœa at that time was not more than ten years of age—a chubby little golden-haired girl whose divine beauty was still a thing of the future, whose fate it was to plunge Atlantis into great turmoil, who was to ensnare me in her toils until I became her most abject slave, whom I was to adore to the end of my days, and who was to share with me and bless my exile. Yet, blind young idiot, I sneered at the sight of her and was determined to refuse obeisance.

And I stood before Arsinhœa the first time defiant—contemptuous, resentful young savage that I was—of the necessity of bowing before such insignificant royalty.

"This," said Gella, "is our cousin, young Prince Pagneomon, who comes to make obeisance to the princess royal."

"Well," observed Arsinhœa, "why doesn't he?"

"I do not kneel to children," I said stubbornly.

With a deft movement of his leg, Baruth knocked my feet from under me, and I found myself sitting on the ground before the princess, who laughed delightedly.

"I do not like the brute and I shall not accept his homage," said the child. "Please keep him away from me; he smells of seaweed. Come, Gella."

Astonished at the spirit of the little girl, I sat on the pavement with my mouth open, then turned upon Baruth with my fists in my fury at the affront he had put upon me.

My father had entered the palace at the far end of the courtyard with my aunt and uncle, and Gella and the princess were following them, so there was none to interfere in the battle which ensued save the soldiers, but they were enjoying the fight too much to part us.

I was bigger and stronger than Baruth and soon knocked him down. The conflict restored my good nature, so I picked him up, we embraced, and that was the end of our animosity.

Perhaps you may wonder how it happened that the king's daughter visited the palace of my uncle, Prince Gathor. The little girl loved my cousin, Gella, very dearly, and, when she was not visiting her, Gella was a guest in the royal palace. She had been escorted that morning by a company of soldiers, who camped in the courtyard while she remained under my uncle's roof, and she was attended by four young women whose adoration and indulgence were rapidly spoiling the child.

That night there was a feast to celebrate my father's arrival, to which a score of nobles of Luth had been invited, and to which Baruth and myself would be permitted until general drunkenness would make our departure desirable. The ladies also feasted, in their own quarters, less voraciously and with more decorum, no doubt.

When I entered the palace, I was astounded by the richness and luxury with which it was furnished, for our own home was simple in comparison. The table was already spread in the great hall, which was a very high, very long room, the walls of which were hung, not with colored woolens, but with cloths of gold and silver. Upon the stone floor was a carpet of thick fur. Great animals, their skins stuffed, their eyes made of some lustrous substance, stood about in lifelike attitudes. I had never seen many of these animals, and Baruth told me that most of them were now extinct; they dated back to the period when Atlantis was many times larger than it was to-day, even with the reclaimed sea bottoms.

Upon the table were set twenty golden platters, beside which stood a gold jar of wine of a shape and character with which I was familiar. In the central wine warehouse was a machine into which a great vase of wine, tightly sealed, would be placed, and, by the use of suction pumps, all air was withdrawn from the inclosure in which the wine case was set. As we were taught by our professors, the absence of air brings extreme cold; thus the removal of the air caused the vase to chill, and the wine inside lost all heat.

After a certain time the vase was removed, and its contents poured into individual jars of great thickness, which preserved the drink at the same low temperature. What would I not give now for such a flagon of the juice of the grape in this hot country! But, alas! when I might have learned all the secrets of our savants I was too much interested in warfare, and I brought little of our knowledge across the seas with me.

Servants, busy with their preparations, ignored the two boys, so we wandered about the great chamber with Baruth, who proudly explained its most interesting features.

At the far end of the room was a wide stone staircase, with a broad landing halfway up to the second floor. Upon this landing was set the figure of the god Garthe, the largest image I had yet seen, although we had several small ones in our home.

Garthe, according to our theology, represented completeness. He had the head of a man, clean shaven, a great, noble head, but he had two bodies, masculine and feminine. Originally man and woman were one and indivisible, but the evil power, Magor, had severed them, put a separate head on each, and thus created male and female, who wander through the world seeking union, which Garthe effects in happy marriage. We worshiped and admired Garthe and prayed to him aloud; but we had more respect for Magor, the evil one, who now had no images but who was worshiped or, rather, appeased in the depths of the secret temples with sacrifices.

Garthe was sleeping when the crime was committed by Magor, and immediately created a new body for himself. Meanwhile man and woman were adrift in the world. With the wisdom of old age I know that both Garthe and Magor were creations of human aspirations and possessed no power over us; but in those days I believed, like everybody else.

"Look," said Baruth. "Here, when we are driven from the feast, is where we shall hide."

He lifted a gold cloth from the wall and showed me a niche behind it.

"See," he said, "I have pierced an eyehole in the cloth, and with my knife I shall cut one for you."

"But what is there to see?"

"After the feast is over there come the secret priestesses of Magor," he said.

"How know you?" I demanded incredulously.

"Because I have often watched.

Have you no feasts such as these in your house on the sea wall?"

"We have feasts, but there are no mad priestesses. I shall not stay to watch."

"Then I shall watch alone."

"Nor shall you," I assured him. "I shall not permit it."

"Bah!" he said in disgust. "I looked forward to your coming, but you are fit only to play with Gella and the young princess who will not have you near her."

"I am fit to break you into small pieces," I said with heat. Truly Baruth, who had been an agreeable youth when he visited us three years before, was become an unpleasant, vicious person. Poor lad, with such a father how could he be aught else? But at the time I did not think of that.

"You take mean advantage of your greater age and strength," he complained. "But in a few years I shall be as tall and strong as you, and then I shall fight you with swords and kill you."

I laughed scornfully and left him to inspect the musical instruments brought in, now, by several slaves. The brazen trumpets were familiar to me; I had heard them often as soldiers passed. But these men had wooden boxes with strings made of the sinews of animals, upon which they produced soft musical tones by drawing across the strings a baton to which was affixed other cords. They also had a sheet of gray metal which gave forth indescribably lovely sounds when struck with a little stick while they bent the metal at the same time. There was, as well, a hollow, wooden cylinder, across the top of which was stretched the skin of a sheep, and this gave forth a rich, sonorous rumble.

"It is the royal orchestra," explained Baruth, who had forgotten his bad temper. "The king has sent it to my father for the feast."

"Is the king coming, also?"

"His majesty never leaves the palace grounds. I supposed everybody knew that. What a countryman you are!"

"Why not?" I demanded, overlooking his impudence in my thirst for information.

"Because the common people must not know what the king looks like. If they discovered that he was a man like themselves, they might say, 'Why does this man live in luxury while we slave and starve?' and that might cause a revolt."

"I see. But it must be irksome to be shut up in that vast pile."

"Everything in the world is there—beautiful gardens, thousands of rooms, food, and wine—and everything. What does he lack?"

"The sight of the ocean. The marvelous sensation of looking out across the whole wide world."

"Pooh! I saw your ocean and did not think much of it. The city is more amusing. Besides, he has his baths—a great swimming pool, with the water warmed to his liking."

"Have you ever seen him?" I asked eagerly.

"No; but Gella has. While she was in the queen's quarters, his majesty entered. She says he is a very small, thin, gentle man, with tired eyes, who was kind to her and adores Arsinhœa."

Baruth then conducted me to my own room on the third floor—a small, bare room with only a few cushions strewn about, and a couch which looked more comfortable than my own at home. Upon investigation I discovered the reason. Upon the stone slab, beneath the feather cushions that were customary, I found a very thick bag which covered the whole slab and which was stuffed with sweet grasses. Upon my exclamation of satisfaction, Baruth said:

"You should see father's bed. It is a frame raised from the floor, across

which woven willow branches are laid. The grass bag is placed on that and then the cushions. Instead of resting on hard stone, he is suspended on the yielding willows. The king has a bed like that, and father's was made by the king's bed maker."

Although it seemed to me rather effeminate for a grown man to wish to sleep suspended in air, I said nothing, but opened the packages brought up by my servants and began to take out my garments. I picked a white robe, hemmed with purple, to wear at the feast, while Baruth went off to prepare himself for the occasion.

That feast! If I have dwelt too long upon its preparations, it is because what I heard and saw upon that occasion changed a careless and ignorant boy into a man. What I heard and what I saw, and the dreadful thing which happened, caused me to drop my childhood like a discarded tunic and don the armor of a warrior, years before my time.

CHAPTER III.

THE FEAST AT THE HOUSE OF GATHOR.

WHEN I went downstairs, I found the hall illuminated, not by torches or great fires, as you may suppose, but by the lamps which only Atlantis possessed. Hundreds of years before, in a remote, barren section of the Luthian plain, men had found a spring the water of which was poisonous and which smelled abominably, but which our wise men had discovered was inflammable. Scoff as you like, in Atlantis we burned water for light and for fire to make vapor in our engines.*

Guests were arriving. A dozen men were in the hall; others were entering, while the servants relieved them of their outer garments and their swords, for it was the rule that no man might lie down to the banquet table bearing a weapon. Quarrels arise easily among men heated with wine, which may be settled harmlessly with blows of the fist, but would end fatally if it were possible to use knives or swords.

My uncle stood in the center of the hall, greeting his guests. To me he seemed a grotesque figure in his headdress of feathers, with his skinny, bare arms and legs displayed by the sleeveless and much-too-short tunic of red and blue which he wore. Beside him stood my superb father, towering over Gathor's head—though he was minus a headdress—and making insignificant the nobles of Luth to whom he was being introduced—at least, so it appeared to his worshiping son.

The guests were all great men of the town, and, looking into the courtyard, ablaze with lights, I saw a veritable army assembled—the escorts of the visitors, for whom long tables had been set, around which the soldiers were crowding, wolfing down pieces of fish and meat and drinking from jugs of wine.

When all were come, my uncle gave the signal and the orchestra burst into welcoming music, a beautiful stream of sound which conjured up in my mind exquisite pictures.

In this barbaric country we squat on our haunches and eat from mats set on the ground. We have not the variety of food which Atlantis provided. This table was raised more than a cubit above the floor, and around it were set twenty comfortable couches made of timber and piled high with pillows. We lay upon our sides and ate at great ease. When all were set except Baruth and myself, who stood meekly awaiting an invitation, my uncle rose and said:

"Noble friends, to-night I introduce to you two young men who will eat with us for a little—my own son, Baruth, my nephew, Pagneomon, son of

*(Note: Petroleum, of course.)

Teforn, who has accompanied his distinguished father hither. Suffer them to be in our midst for a brief while, that they may benefit from the high thoughts and great wit of this company. Come, young men, take places at the foot of the table."

The guests waved arms in friendly fashion, and we advanced, I rather timidly, Baruth boldly, and lay down upon the couches at the lower end of the table. The men nearest us slapped us encouragingly upon the backs and offered us cups of wine, which we drank gratefully. Ah! the refreshing coldness of the wine; my tongue licks my parched lips to-day at the thought of it.

The music began again, and a curtain at the right of the hall was drawn, which showed us a long line of men servants, unclad save for a short skirt, each bearing a dish, who immediately filed into the hall and began to serve.

Shall I tell you what there was to eat? Marvelous roasted fish, with browned yams, chickens done to a turn, and finally twelve men carried in on a gigantic platter a whole bull, minus head and legs and skin, which was set with great difficulty upon the center of the table.

The guests shouted to one another so loudly that we could no longer hear the music; they drank so deep that their jugs were being filled continually by the grinning slaves. Baruth and I ate our share and drank far more than was good for us; in fact, so greedy were we that when the roast bull was carved we could partake of but little of the delicious beef. I remember that I was indignant when my father's slave touched my shoulder and told me to depart, but Baruth also got his congé at the same time and we slunk off together.

The young rascal slipped a jug of wine under his tunic, made a sign to me, and I followed him unthinking as he had led me toward an exit. Then he turned suddenly, slipped behind the gold hangings, and began to work his way to the niche he had shown me earlier in the evening. Although I had been indignant at the moment, now I laughed at the thought of being present still at this delightful festival, and I crept after him. He applied his eye to the hole he had made, and when I tried to push him away so that I might peek also, he drew a little knife from beneath his robe and cut a hole in the hanging for me, to which I no longer had any scruples against placing my eye.

For a time nothing happened, except that the shouting grew louder and the drinking more heavy. Baruth was drinking from the jug he had stolen, but I did not wish any more wine and told him so.

"So much the better for me," he declared.

Now arose a wild shrieking of females, and the landing at the head of the great staircase was filled with women, whose yellow and brown hair flowed free and whose mouths were open in demoniacal yelling.

"Ah!" whispered Baruth. "The madwomen."

The guests sent up a welcoming shout, whereupon the entertainers rushed in a mob down the stairs, then circled the great table, while the music brayed, and began a furious dance which, to me, was a blur of waving arms, moving feet, and flying hair. All the time the women screamed and the men bellowed encouragement. I caught a glimpse of my father, who lay quietly on his couch, busy with his food, ignoring the dancers; but the other guests were already starting up. They rushed upon the line of dancers and drew them to the feast, where they fed them food from the table, washed down by wine.

By and by there was only one dancer

the general of the army, and my good friends. None, more than he, regrets the death of your father; he has offered the proper amend—six male and female slaves whom you may put to death in any manner which pleases you, and whom you may offer to Magor in exchange for a free passage for Teforn to the realms of Garthe. If you accept, all is well; but if you refuse, for his own protection Negor becomes our enemy, yours and mine, and he has power to destroy us all. As you are a child, I shall accept for you."

"No!" I declared. "Never! Do you hear? I saw that man slay my father. "I will kill him and offer *him* to Magor."

"You young fool, he is a powerful warrior and you are an infant. Do you suppose I shall permit you to ruin my household?"

"I understand you, uncle," I said, seeing him in all his meanness. "You are afraid of this Negor. It is for your own sake that you wish me to accept. Well, I refuse. Do you hear? I refuse."

My uncle regarded me with anger.

"You will not have the chance, my rooster," he said. "I will keep you under lock and key until this matter is settled."

He clapped his hands and a slave entered.

"Get two armed men and put them beside the chamber door of my nephew. Do not permit him to emerge unless I call for him in person," he commanded.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SORCERESS.

WITH a cry of fury I rushed at my treacherous relative, but he, also, was too strong for me, and soon two slaves dragged me to my quarters, thrust me in, and I heard the heavy bar fall upon the outside of the door. I was a prisoner in my uncle's house. Being but a child, after all, I fell upon my couch and wet it with my angry tears.

Hours passed as I lay there in darkness, but after a long time I heard the bar being lifted. The door opened and a light appeared. First entered a slave with a lamp, and then followed my Aunt Fedrath, instead of Gathor, whom I expected.

At her I gazed with astonished eyes, and her loveliness was overpowering, even to my youthful eyes. Her long black hair hung about her like a thundercloud; her black eyes were shining with a strange light. About her hung a large red-and-yellow shawl, while her white feet were bare.

"Set the lamp upon that table," she commanded; "then wait for me outside."

The burning-water lamp lit the room brightly, and I saw a kind expression cross her usually rather sullen face. I stood respectfully before her, waiting for an explanation of her appearance; but, for a moment, she said nothing and gazed intently at me. Then she sighed and nodded.

"Dear boy," she said in a crooning voice which was yet thrilling to the ear, "you are good and brave and like your father, I am sure, and you burn to revenge him, do you not?"

I nodded and a sob choked me. Fedrath glided to me and wrapped me in her embrace, drew my head close to her just like a mother, and I wept like an infant. She dried my tears with her soft shawl, then made me sit beside her.

"Your Uncle Gathor has told me all," she said in her deep, rich tones. "My husband is a weak coward, Pagneomon, unworthy to tie the laces of your dead father's sandals, and he fears for his own skin because Negor is very strong. Therefore, he plans to accept the offering of Negor and live in peace with

him, and, if necessary, silence you lest your rashness imperil him."

"I know," I said. "I talked with him."

"Teforn was a great man," she said. "From the moment I first saw him I loved him, but I was wed to Gathor. I mourn him as your mother mourns, and want him revenged just as you thirst for vengeance."

"Thank you, aunt," I sighed.

"Think you, Pagneomon, your desire for Negor's blood will die out as time passes?"

"No!" I declared stoutly.

"Are you willing to swear to kill him when the time comes?"

"Yes."

"Good. I shall help you. You are in danger in this house and at your sea-wall palace, for Negor will take no chances. He will pay the ransom and then have you slain at the first opportunity. And Gathor will not mind that, for he will rule your estate. You must grow to manhood, and become very strong so that, when you do meet Negor, you may kill him and not fall before his sword. You must wait at least five years."

"I want to kill him now."

"You must do as I say."

Young as I was, I had sense enough to understand that she was right. What good would it do the ghost of my father if I fell at the hand of his murderer? I nodded.

"Yes, aunt. I shall do as you advise."

"Good. Now, Pagneomon, I am going to tell you something which you must swear never to reveal. I am a secret priestess of Magor."

In horror I recoiled from the beautiful woman, to whom I had warmed as to my mother, and she angered for a moment, but then smiled kindly.

"Not like those mad dancers who proved your father's undoing. I know the secrets of the black god; I have seen him and he has told me things. I belong to a cult which practices the true religion: 'Bow to evil which may harm you, not to good, which is powerless like the foolish god, Garthe.' All the savants in the kingdom are worshipers of Magor. He has revealed to them great knowledge. Whence comes that lamp of burning water, those engines which push back the sea, but from the secret book of Magor? Around your neck, beneath your tunic, I shall place this tiny shell, which is the token of the brotherhood, and you shall grow up beneath the protecting veil of the black god. Are you willing, or do you prefer, like your miserable uncle, to bargain with the dog, Negor?"

"If Magor will help me slay Negor, I shall do his bidding."

"It is well," said the strange woman. "This very night you leave this house. I shall throw a spell upon your guards so that they shall sleep and not see you depart. A fleet buthom will convey you from the rear portal to the far end of Luth, where the plateau changes into a high mountain from which black smoke has issued from the beginning and will until the end of time. Two slaves will accompany you; they are my servants and will conduct you to the cave of Thoro, the wise, who dwells in the shadow of the smoking mountain. You shall live with him and learn from him for five years, and await the signal from me of your return. Have you patience?"

"Yes, aunt."

Fedrath rose, kissed me on the brow, placed the queer black shell, which hung upon a golden chain, around my neck, and hid it beneath my tunic. Then she drew from her girdle a little knife, and with it made a small incision in her wrist from which red drops came slowly. Taking a dish, she held up her wrist to drip upon it. Then she cut my wrist—though I winced, I permitted the strange rite—and my

blood mingled with hers upon the plate. Holding it high above her head, she began slowly to dance, reciting, in a strange tongue, magic words, and suddenly the plate began to smoke, and a burst of red flame rose almost to the ceiling and extinguished itself.

"It is well," she said. "Magor accepts you. From this day you will never pay homage to Garthe, or, if you are forced to do so, recite the prayers backward. Come, now."

Obediently, I buckled on my little sword, threw my feathered cloak across my arm, thrust my feet into the ox sandals, and accepted the hand she stretched out to me. Fedrath extended her free hand toward the door, which slowly opened. She picked up the lamp and extinguished it, but a green light, the source of which I could not see, filled the corridor and showed me the two armed slaves, lying asleep on the stone floor.

As we moved, the green light preceded us, and we descended a flight of stairs, moved along another corridor and down a second flight to a small portal, which opened noiselessly as if by magic and showed us the night without.

"Depart and fear nothing, brave boy," said my aunt. She bent suddenly and kissed me again on the forehead, and then I saw three buthoms standing outside, upon two of which men sat motionless.

With a wave of her arm Fedrath stepped backward, and the door shut upon her. Without hesitation, I mounted upon the black buthom in the middle of the trio, the word to start was given, and immediately we moved silently and swiftly away.

I knew that it was forbidden for riders to pass through the streets of Luth in the small hours of the morning, and I expected each moment the challenge of the night watch, yet we rode through tranquil streets without meeting a soldier. The two men with me said not a word.

The gates were always closed at night and surely we would be stopped there, I thought; but as we approached the postern one of the guides suddenly turned his mount into an alley down which we followed him until he stopped before a low door. He knocked three times and it opened, although I saw no guardian. We crossed a courtyard, descended through a dark passage in single file, and moved along it for some distance until I realized that we were again going upward. After half an hour of such progress we passed through a door into a street, and, looking back, I saw, far behind us, the wall of the city.

Through some passage known only to the followers of Magor we had escaped from the city and were now in the unguarded suburbs. However, we were not to avoid all encounter, for suddenly a military patrol of a dozen footmen debouched from a building and spread across the street ahead of us, while their leader shouted:

"Who are you and where do you go?"

I felt for my sword, but the man beside me touched me on the arm and shook his head.

Meanwhile, the company had leveled at us long spears and began to advance. My other guide, who had thrust his hand into a pouch which hung at his side, now lifted his arm and hurled a dark object ahead of him, which suddenly, without sound, burst into a flame as it landed at the feet of the soldiers. They scattered with shouts of terror. Hardly less alarmed than the warriors, I made an outcry; but the guide at the left grasped the cord of my buthom and we darted forward at full speed. The flame was already extinguished. It was my first sight of the fireball of Magor.

And now we were leaving the last of

the suburbs of Luth, and we saw its towers outlined behind us against the gray light of morning, which caused my guides to urge our mounts onward at greater speed.

The plateau of Luth extended from the city to the western ocean, as far as a man could march in thirty days; but a buthom could traverse it in four or five days. In the period when Atlantis had been a continent this plateau had been neglected, as its soil, save in the vicinity of the city, was not very fertile; but the sinking of nine tenths of our territory beneath the sea had driven upon it hundreds of thousands of poor creatures who tried to eke a living from its mean earth.

I have mentioned the great exodus which removed millions of them, and then the reclamation of the sea bottom by means of the great walls had caused most of the remainder to seek the new and fertile lands. It was thus that at this time the plateau again was thinly settled.

As the morning wore on, we moved rapidly over good roads, meeting a few peasants, who scuttled into the fields to give us passage, and passing through half a dozen villages consisting of a great, round castle, where lived the lord, and a few score tiny, conical huts which housed the serfs.

CHAPTER V.

THE BURNING MOUNTAIN.

LONG since, we had lost the sea; it was the first time since my birth I had been completely out of sight of it, for it could be seen, bright blue in the distance, from all parts of the great city. We passed a number of abandoned castles and villages which were without inhabitants, and in one of these we took refuge to break our fast and to hide from a company of mounted soldiers which one of my guides had discerned in the distance.

Through a chink in the wall of the big house I watched the military pass—two hundred fine soldiers mounted upon sleek birds. Their brazen helmets glittered in the sunlight, their spear heads gleamed. Their leader, a tall man with a towering headdress of red feathers, rode some distance in advance. Fortunately, they made no pause at our place of refuge; most likely were not searching for us.

Perhaps I should describe here the wonderful system of communication which extended through my country, by means of which the police could, in a few hours, notify their agents in the far distance of what it was necessary they should know. Every thousand paces on the main road was a slender tower where a watchman always waited. From the tower extended a pole with crossbars upon it, and there had been devised messages to cover every possible emergency, which were transmitted by the angle at which this pole depended and the relation to it of the crossbars. By this means the watchmen passed along the messages so rapidly that word would reach in two hours a distance which it would take a buthom to travel two days. However, I was sure my aunt would have deceived Gathor regarding my absence and that he would not miss me for hours yet.

I had made the disconcerting discovery that both my guides were deaf and dumb, and so I could hold no communication with them, nor could they afterward betray where they had conducted me, since slaves were not taught to read and write. However, there were many questions I would have wished to ask them and these were made impossible.

During the afternoon we made a wide circle to avoid the city of Mummor, the second in the kingdom, which had more than sixty thousand inhabitants and was governed by a cousin of the king. From Mummor, in the past,

rebel armies had marched to overthrow the royal house, and sometimes they had succeeded. However, Horthe, the king's cousin, was said to be devoted to him. It was very fertile around Mummor and there were huge forests in the vicinity.

By a wise law, because of the scarcity of timber on our island, no tree could be cut down without royal warrant, and when a tree was felled it was necessary to plant two new ones. Thus, despite our dense population, there were large forests where the soil would support them.

We crept cautiously through the forests and succeeded in leaving Mummor behind us without incident.

By nightfall the character of the land began to change. There were huge rocks of the kind which, I had been taught, were thrown out by the burning mountain, and the land hereabouts was barren. The road was no longer good; with a scanty population at this end of the country the king had not felt it necessary to keep it in condition. It was somewhere hereabouts, I knew, that the burning water bubbled out of the ground, and when quite dark we passed a huge building where a vast quantity of it was stored.

We passed great herds of buthoms, which can subsist upon the poor grasses and the snails and worms that abound in this part of the country. The herds were guarded by a few peasants, who were adepts at hurling a looped rope over the small head and tightening it around the long, thin neck of the bird, thus making it helpless.

During the next day we encountered numerous individuals who were either mounted or afoot, and who regarded us fiercely but made no effort to molest us. I assumed these to be the savage Atlantides of the western country who refused to pay the king's taxes, but who had a way of vanishing when soldiers were sent to chastise them.

All day we could see the mountain, with its plume of black smoke curling above its crest, a grim sentinel posted at our western edge—not a high mountain, as I have learned to know in my new home, but to us residents of a low plateau and sea bottoms a monstrous hill, indeed.

On the third day we began to go up this mountain by a winding path, so steep that our birds refused to move upon it faster than a walk. It was a wild, grim, savage country, indeed, quite uninhabited then, though we continued to pass vestiges of houses and villages which dated from the period of overpopulation before the great exodus. No more soldiers or peasants were encountered, for this was Magor's land and the good people gave it a wide berth.

I need not say that I was most uncomfortable, for my religious education had been conventional and I believed that I was condemned to eternal punishment through my bargain with my witch of an aunt. Nevertheless, I still thirsted for the blood of Negor, murderer of my father, and if I must make compact with the powers of evil to obtain it, I was none the less determined to have it.

We passed springs where water was so hot it boiled, and at one time we were so close to a hole in the ground, from which suddenly spurted a stream of hot water as high as the king's palace, that the spray fell upon us, to our great discomfort.

Trees and grass no longer sprouted; only queer shrubs, covered with spines, grew, and trees, misshapen and gnarled as a man who has been tortured. That I was in the country of the evil one seemed self-evident, and I would have breathed prayers to the great god Garthe, had I not been oath bound never again to appeal to him.

There was a strange smell in the air now, an odor which irritated the

nostrils—fumes, no doubt, from the vent holes of the mountain, beneath which eternal fires burned—and I watched my guides to see if they felt fear, but their sallow countenances were placid. After all, such wretches had no purpose in continuing to live, and perhaps they might have welcomed death.

The path at last divided, and we turned into the fork at the left hand. After a few moments my guides dismounted from their birds and motioned to me to do likewise. After tying the creatures to a deformed tree, we began to crawl like flies up the side of the sheer cliff, holding on by our fingers to jutting rocks, scarcely finding a place to rest our feet, until we came upon a wide ledge. We continued along it till we entered a cleft where a great boulder seemed to have split in twain. The passage ended abruptly before a flat rock twice as high as my head, and here the foremost guide stopped, drew a horn, from beneath his tunic, and blew two short blasts upon it. For a moment we waited in suspense.

I heard something like the snorting of a great animal, and saw jets of vapor pouring out from the cliff above. Then, suddenly, the rock in front of us began to rise slowly and steadily until it showed us a narrow portal behind it. I wished to draw back, but, remembering that I could not display fear before slaves, I boldly followed them into the passage which opened before us.

It turned abruptly to the right hand, descended sharply, and suddenly brought us into a brightly lighted and very lofty chamber hewn from the solid rock, the air of which was pure and sweet. The place was furnished and decorated like a palace in Luth—upon the walls, paintings against golden hangings; a richly carved table in the center of the room; several comfortable divans strewn about; a carpet of thick fur; and a dozen bright lamps making it almost as clear as day.

From a bench behind the table rose a person who, I knew, must be Thoro himself—a small man with a very long white beard, which was braided like a woman's tresses, a shock of white hair, and a face which was old, yet young. It as not at all an evil face, but smooth as a boy's. I noted especially his large, hooked nose, deep-set eyes of sea blue, and narrow, jutting chin. At once I lost all fear, for this was a kindly old man, and his smile, which displayed white teeth, was one of welcome.

"So this is the young avenger," he said pleasantly, as he advanced and placed his right arm around my neck. "Greetings, son of Teforn, Prince Pagneomon of Azoria."

"Why," I stammered, "how did you hear about me, sir? We have traveled fast and no one has passed us."

"Ask not yet to know the secrets of Magor," he returned. "Suffice it that my daughter, Fedrath, has sent word of your coming and of your consecration to Magor. Fortunate youth, to be received at your age in the fellowship of wisdom!"

That was my introduction to the wisest and most noble man who ever lived, as noble as my own father—wiser, I must admit. Since Atlantis has perished, never again will such a brain develop upon this miserable globe.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CULT OF THE BLACK GOD.

IT is not my purpose to narrate in great detail my life with Thoro, during the five years in which I prepared for my contest with Negor; yet certain things must be told, that you may understand what followed.

In the heart of the mountain dwelt Thoro, high priest of Magor, and his followers, who spent their whole lives in the pursuit of knowledge. In the

beginning I distrusted them all as accursed men and workers of evil, but soon I loved and admired them as the wisest and the best, for, beneath the cloak of Magor, they worked to increase the wisdom of mankind.

Centuries before, our stupid ancestors set down as the work of the evil god anything which was beyond their limited comprehension, and they fed to the monsters of the deep the wise men who offered them means of progress. In time the savants formed a brotherhood for mutual protection, and made use of their discoveries to terrorize the ignorant and so gain peace.

Under the mantle of Magor they studied and made their experiments, and, in time of stress, through the secret agents whom they had established in the city and even in the court of the king, they proffered inventions that were the means of preventing great disasters. Had their warnings been heeded, most of those who perished during the great inundations might have been saved, and it was through one of these priests of Magor that the idea of the sea walls to reclaim the ocean bottoms was promulgated.

From Thoro I learned how one of his predecessors, centuries before, had studied the mighty force of the vapor which shot out of the mountain upon occasion, and how, upon the principle of it, he had invented the vapor engine which was used to force the ocean back beyond the walls.

In the caves and recesses of the mountain resided more than a thousand savants, who subsisted through the offerings made by the ignorant peasants to the god, Magor. Herds of cattle, furs, corn, gold—everything necessary was forthcoming at a hint that Magor required appeasing. Thus the ignorant, who would have persecuted these savants, were responsible for their comfortable existence.

At first I feared Magor as the rest of the Atlantides did, but in time I learned from Thoro that he was but a bugaboo who had no existence, and his manifestations were carefully calculated tricks of the brotherhood. Thoro was gentle and kind—but a stern taskmaster. He forced me to study the secret books in which was set down all that men had learned about life and death in two thousand years or more.

Although priests of a god, these men were sure that neither Garthe nor Magor existed; but, for their own safety, they exercised the functions of priests, and the royal officers were careful not to molest them.

It would take a very long time to set down the researches they made into the sources of life of man and animals, the depths of nature, the influence exercised by the stars, and the beginnings of our nation.

From herbs and barks of trees they compounded liquids which would cause men to die, or restore them to health if they were ill, or render them insane or temporarily deprived of motion. Even now I shudder at my first impression of the laboratory of Thoro and his doctors, in which they studied from living men and animals the structure of the human bodies.

While I was not weak minded enough to object to the killing of a slave, it seemed too horrible that the miserable creatures should be allowed to live on. But I soon understood that only by such methods could the physicians learn how to cure the diseases and wounds of freemen and nobles.

As I mentioned earlier, we had a custom by which the slaying of a freeman could be expiated by the presentation of slaves to be slaughtered as an offering to Magor, the number of slaves depending upon the importance of the murdered persons. The bodies of the creatures were sent to Thoro by his agents, and were completely dissevered by his assistants and much

learned thereby. However, the spectacle of the great cave, dotted with stone slabs upon which lay human bodies, over which bent ghoullike priests with instruments, was too much for me on the first occasion, and I lost my senses, to find myself later lying upon my couch in the stone chamber reserved for me.

It must be admitted that I was not a scientist in thought or mind, but a warrior from the first, and many of the wonderful discoveries were incomprehensible to me and the inventions beyond my ability to understand. Nevertheless, in the course of time, I learned more than any person in Atlantis not a member of the inner circle of priests of Magor.

Thoro often shook his head and smiled in pity at my stupidity; but, after all, I was there for a special purpose—to grow strong and crafty, so that when I became a man I could overthrow Negor. Thus they did not endeavor to make a savant of me, but a fighting man. And for this, also, were they equipped.

There were stout slaves in the caves who understood how to bend a bow and throw a javelin, how to wield a spear and strike home with the heavy or the light sword, and Thoro told me that, when the time came, I should go forth with weapons and armor the like of which were not known in Atlantis.

In the beginning of our civilization men had fought with weapons of sharp stones, but after a long time there was found in the ground a metal which could be melted in molds to any required shape, and, by alloying it with another metal, it was sufficiently hard to serve as swords and spear heads. With this were our modern weapons made.* A shrewd blow, however, would bend a sword out of shape, and our art of fencing was intended to make the enemy's weapon useless before dispatching him.

Thoro, in the course of time, revealed to me that he had discovered a certain kind of rock which, if subjected to a great heat, would produce a new metal that also could be molded. It was so hard that nothing could bend or break it. It could be sharpened to a keener edge than the bronze, and when subjected alternately to great heat and cold, had a pliability unknown hitherto.* With such metallic weapons he promised to equip me, and thus I should be invincible.

More important than all, he taught me the forgotten art of war. In the past we had great generals who handled armies skillfully so as to defeat much more powerful forces, but during our long immunity to attack by other nations, due to their destruction by the sea, we had completely forgotten military science. Thus, in our civil wars, the king's forces and rebels had run together in mobs, and the battle was decided by the doughtiest individual fighters, with the commanders warring in the front ranks, regardless of how the contest went elsewhere.

In the library of the high priest of Magor were many books written upon skins of sheep or upon the leaves of a plant which grew profusely near the edge of rivers, and in these books was the forgotten lore of war. Thus I learned that a general should always remain upon a high place in the rear, hold choice troops in reserve to be sent in wherever there was need, should sometimes feign a retreat to lure his enemy into a carefully prepared place, should always try to take him on the side or in the rear; in other words, to direct a battle instead of endeavoring to win it by personal prowess. While I shame to confess that most of our scientific discoveries remained mystic to

*(Note: Pagneomon speaks here of copper and tin, doubtless.)

*(Note: Undoubtedly a crude form of steel.)

me, I absorbed the lore of warfare, which served me in good stead in Atlantis. Later, when I landed with a few score followers in this benighted land, it enabled me to overthrow the barbarians and make myself king.

There were times during my sojourn in these caves that the earth rumbled and growled beneath us and the mountain sent forth poisonous vapors which penetrated into our retreat; but always Thoro knew in advance what was to come, and forced all to wear over the face a cloth dipped in a bad-smelling fluid, which, nevertheless, counteracted the poisonous air and enabled us to live through the disturbances.

Often I went above ground and rode at high speed upon a buthom, attended by several slaves, and Thoro sometimes accompanied me. Giving me several hundred attendants, he taught me how to drill and maneuver them upon the rough countryside so that I should be skilled in practice as well as theory.

In olden times armies of foot soldiers had decided all wars; but the taming of the buthom—the strange bird of which there is no like in this land—and the addition of a mounted man, with a sword and javelin and short spear, had changed the face of warfare.

Now a charge of a thousand buthoms would decide any battle, for the infantry would thrown away their arms and fly as soon as they appeared—which explained why my father had considered that no army was necessary save a few thousand royal guards and ten thousand buthom riders. Thoro, however, believed differently.

"A skillful general," he said, "could easily defeat the buthom riders, provided he could persuade his infantry not to fear them. The buthom is a clumsy beast; it cannot fly or take long leaps, and, weighted down by its rider, could easily become entangled in pits and morasses. Furthermore, it may be terrified and driven back upon its own forces, for no rider can control the bird if it takes it into its stupid head to run away. All that is necessary is to have your men armed with very long spears which project like a hedge, and draw them up behind soft ground well pitted. Bear it in mind should the need ever arise, Pagneomon."

During the years I resided with Thoro I never saw a woman, and, as I grew to manhood, I began to yearn unconsciously for the society of a female and the joy of a pretty face.

Messages had come to me from my aunt that my mother and sister were well, that she was still biding her time, that Gathor was spending my revenues as though they were his own, and that the murderer, Negor, was high in power, controlled the actions of the king absolutely, and was the real ruler of Luth and Atlantis.

There were certain small beasts in the country which I was permitted to hunt, that I might become a skillful archer and throw the javelin with proper force. For an hour, every morning upon arising, I was forced to exercise my arms and legs, my back and all my sinews most rigorously, so that I would grow tall and strong.

When the day came around which marked the twentieth year of my birth, I suppose I was the most powerful young man in all Atlantis. During the period when other youths were drinking wine to excess and dallying, I was living on plain fare, drinking cold water and conserving all my forces. This, with my training and exercises, made me strong, indeed. To my five years with Thoro I owe the superb health I have always enjoyed, and the condition of my body which has permitted me to live twice the span of ordinary men.

On my twentieth birthday Thoro commanded his chief astrologists to study

the stars in their courses and foretell my future. There was one theory of the priests of Magor which, despite their wisdom, I have always refused belief. This was that our earth is a gigantic sphere which floats unsupported in space, influenced much by the movement of other globes which we call stars, the moon and the sun. I could not believe it because it controverted the evidence of all my senses.

Furthermore he asserted that the turning of this globe completely around brought it into the light of the sun, which did not move; yet with my own eyes I had seen the sun daily rise out of the sea and sink somewhere beyond the plateau of Luth to the west. Various devices he showed me to convince me, but they did not convince, and finally he allowed it to pass. However, I did not deny that the various stars might guide my destiny and I awaited with eagerness the verdict of the astrologer, which, when it came, puzzled not only me but all the priests of Magor, including Thoro himself.

"Pagneomon, son of Teforn," said the wise reader of the secrets of the heavens, "is destined to a long and turbulent existence. He first will span the boundless ocean to the west; he will survive all inhabitants of Atlantis, and when he perishes, with him will end the race of the Atlantides."

"Shall I slay Negor?" I demanded impatiently, for the rest seemed cryptic gibberish.

"As to that, the stars have not spoken," responded the wise man. This made me angry.

Thoro—he sat alone with me in his great hall when the astrologer informed me of these things—Thoro looked very grave and somewhat puzzled.

"That he shall have long life, I understand," he said. "It means, Pagneomon, since you propose to fight Negor, that you will conquer him or your life would be cut short indeed. But how can you survive the babes born yesterday and those who will come into the world in the next twenty years? Surely the stars have conferred immortality upon you or they have written the doom of our country."

"An I do not kill Negor, you may be sure I shall give the lie to the stars, for I shall take my own life," I declared. "For the rest, it is like the oracle of the great god, Garthe, which always may be translated to mean whatever you wish. As for crossing the sea to the west, it runs over the edge of the world, and I shall do nothing so foolish."

"Thus is our schooling wasted upon you," retorted Thoro sternly. "Does the western sea from the summit of this mountain differ in appearance from the sea to the east, as you saw it from your father's palace?"

"No."

"Yet we know, by actual exploration, that, after weeks of sailing and rowing, a galley bound eastward comes upon a great land extending far to the north and south, to which our exiles took themselves, and where they have now established nations. Why should there not also be a continent to the westward? If there be not, you might sail on and on for a long time and come at last to the lands to the east, for the world is a sphere."

"If it is a sphere, why does not all the water roll off it?" I demanded pertly, though I knew well his theory.

The old man hit the gong upon the table a heavy blow with a stick, and, when Lunco, his personal guard, entered, he said:

"Take this stupid boy away; he wearies me. Besides, Pagneomon, I must consider in private the amazing revelation of the stars regarding your future."

In truth, I considered it myself, for,

like all modern Atlantides, I dreaded the sea and ships.

In the remote ages when our country was so much greater, those who lived near the ocean were bold mariners and made voyages of discovery to the east and north and south, but never the west, where we believed the world ended.

However, these maritime peoples had perished with the inundation, and only the central part of Atlantis remained above water. Thus our exiles took ship with the greatest reluctance—only, in fact, because it was sure death for them to remain on land—and since that time we had rarely sought communication with other lands.

Because of our large population and the difficulty of procuring enough food, the king insisted upon men putting to sea for fish; but the fishermen clung close to our coasts, and headed for the half dozen ports, which had been constructed outside the sea wall, at the slightest indication of a tempest. I could face Negor in single combat, or fight the king's entire army with courage, but the very thought of making a voyage into the west caused me to tremble.

I gladly believed that I would have a long life, though I scoffed at surviving all the inhabitants of Atlantis. Thoro was more than threescore years old, and some of our savants were older than he; but few men lived beyond the age of fifty, and those who survived were miserable, without teeth, wrinkled, bent and very old. Thus I had no more than thirty years' hope of existence, and already there were children in the world who would only be thirty when I was fifty.

To be continued next week.

A GOOD WORD FOR WAR

NOBODY believes in war any more. Some people believe we ought to be prepared for war, and that there have been times when we had to go to war, and that such times may come again. But every one hastens to say that he believes war is an absolutely unmitigated, a wholly monstrous, curse.

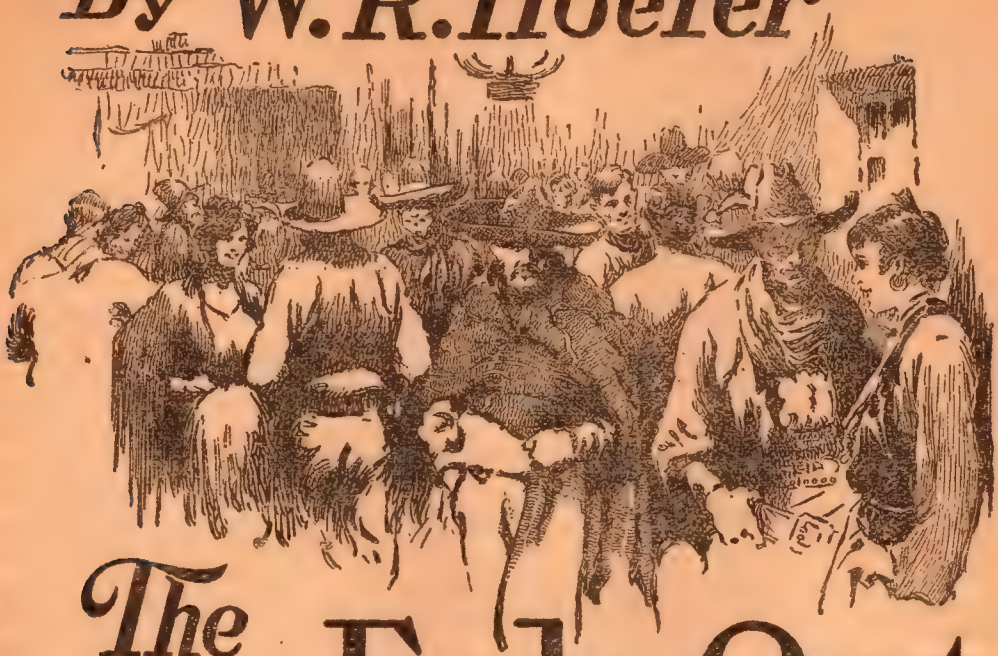
That simply isn't true. War has its good points. A very great number of people, probably a vast majority, have a whale of a good time out of a really first-class war. Even the soldiers, most of them, like it better than selling ribbons, or making typewriters.

Excitement! That's the cue! Brass bands, flaming headlines, parades, burning speeches, uniforms, enthusiasm! "Down with the dirty enemy! Kill 'em! Hurray! To the devil with worrying about this and that! We've got a *war* to fight!"

Which, every once in a while, is a very good thing for everybody concerned.

No need to paint the other side of the picture. It has been done a thousand times; and it is, on the whole, only too true. The worst of it comes not so much to the men who are killed, as to the fellows who are cruelly, pitifully maimed for life. Disease does the same thing to men; and it is probably no more and no less so preventable than war.

By W. R. Hoefer



The Fade-Out

Author of "Ways That Are Dark," "The Long Shot," Etc.

Tommy Atherton certainly was a hell-raiser on his first night in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. He kicked up quite a little dust the next evening, too; but for a better purpose.

IT was the hour of the siesta; and Nuevo Laredo, that ugly little spot of flying dust and hot winds and no morals whatever, which lies simmering on the Mexican side of the border, dozed peacefully in the white sun glare.

Inertia held man and beast alike. Mongrel dog and peon master drowsed side by side in the thin shade of side-street dobe shacks. A patient donkey nodded between his shafts, as his driver slept in the shadow of his cart. And business, even along the bar-lined main thoroughfare, was stilled to almost nothing; for it was two o'clock in the afternoon, and not until seven, when the parching sun was down and men's spirits were up, would the tourists and others flow over the Rio Grande in thirsty streams from the American side of the International Bridge.

Even in the bar of Miguel Obrienne, Pedro, the barber, was a solitary customer. Lazily twisting his sable mustachios, he regarded his third glass of *tequila* with sleepy, tranquil eyes; allowed a swallow of the sulphuric liquid to trickle down his throat; then licked his heavy lips with relish. Pedro loved to linger over his refreshment; and not for an hour, save by extreme chance, was one likely to enter his place to be shaven or shorn.

"It is now——" announced Pedro, glancing from the three sleeping Mexican bartenders sprawled over broken

chairs at the end of the bar to the garish poster on the wall back of it, "it is now only t'ree more weeks for the gr-reat bullfight." He read aloud from the poster, displaying his command of English with unction. "'Four Brave Bulls! Four! Which Will Fight to the Death!' Ah," he inquired of the burly proprietor, his black eyes glistening, "you will see thees gr-reat *evento,* eh, Señor Obrienne?"

But Señor Miguel Obrienne, whose mind was far from the Mexican national holiday and its celebrating event, ignored the query. Señor Obrienne was thoughtfully gazing across the dirt road, through the dust clouds raised by a passing mule cart, at a recumbent object in the doorway of Tomasso Perez's little tamale stand. The object had been there, motionless as death, for several hours. But before that—indeed, all through the previous night and into the early morning—it had been very much alive.

It had been, to be plain, very drunk; noisily, obstreperously, painfully drunk. It had begun its thirsty and fractious journey through the dirty little border town even in Señor Obrienne's well-conducted, if not too honest bar, with three rousing cheers for the good old U. S. A. And it had ended its flamboyant tour at the same place, with more rousing cheers for the good old U. S. A., Mexico, and all points south, north, east and west. Then, impelled by many strong hands, it had zigzagged out across the street and very suddenly become oblivious of geography and all else, right on Tomasso Perez's doorstep.

Nor had Tomasso disturbed it. That might well have been injudicious. For, on the night previous, this recumbent object had left a trail of destruction in its high-stepping wake.

In Señor Miguel Obrienne's place alone, a place known in the States, as well as in Mexico, as "one tough joint," the man had damaged three patrons. Playfully pushing two murderous-looking Mexicans over a fat and indignant tourist from East Orange, New Jersey, and out into the filth-littered back yard, and socking a huge, aggressive sausage salesman from Milwaukee, on the chin with paralyzing effect, he had then laughed in the bulldog face of the burly Señor Obrienne himself—and got away with it. What had occurred among the dance halls out along the Avenue Carranza—certainly no peace-loving section—only the afflicted could tell, and the final returns were not yet in. Indeed, how this recumbent object had escaped the local police force and the torrid little jail and the customary fine of eighty pesos, was a thing for wonder.

No, Tomasso Perez had not disturbed the man. Besides, he was an hospitable soul, who, moreover, held a vast admiration for a good fighter.

The object was stirring now. It rolled over once, stretched a magnificent pair of young arms, yawned and grunted, grimaced at what tasted like burning feathers in its mouth; and then sat up.

Tomasso, grinning with sympathy and admiration, stepped to his ice-water bucket. Across the way Señor Miguel Obrienne frowned. Though accustomed to disturbances of many kinds and degrees, he wished no encore of last evening's disturbance. Nuevo Laredo, of the State of Tamaulipas, could, he felt, well afford to relinquish this young man to Laredo, of the State of Texas. The trick was to get him back there.

"Go," demanded Señor Obrienne of the Mexican boy in his doorway, "and tell that young tiger over there that, if he is broke, I will pay his way back across the bridge."

The boy ran over; and soon ran back.

"What does he say?" inquired Obrienne.

"He say," replied the boy, "that never is he going back to the United States, which would be for him too much pain."

"That all?"

"No, señor. He say, also, that he have spend weeth you las' night maybe t'irty *pesos,* American; an' the toll across the bridge is five *centavos,* also American."

"Well?"

"And he say to tell that you are mos' kind and *generoso,* and you can go plumb to hell," was the studied reply.

"The young divil," the señor exclaimed, scowling. He swore loudly, and in fluent American; for across the Rio Grande Señor Miguel Obrienne, who had gone out of his native land when prohibition came in, was Mr. Michael O'Brien.

The cause of this profane torrent, young Tommy Atherton of New York, Los Angeles, and other places, turned an idle ear to the big Irishman across the way, and an eager throat to the ice-water bucket of Tomasso Perez. When he had partially quenched the fires within him, he extracted his last cigarette from the flattened packet in his soiled, though well-tailored trousers, and dully reviewed what he could recall of the previous night.

If there was a bar he had missed, no one in Nuevo Laredo could afterward recall it. From O'Brien's Ace Café to the lowliest native drinking stand, from the expensive Bohemian Club to the commonest Mexican dive, around through the dance hall district where the hot desert winds make the roads a dust blast, and back again to Mike O'Brien's place, he had coursed a disturbing way through the little one-story Mexican town.

At eight o'clock he had started over the International Bridge with some two hundred dollars in his jeans and an acute ache in his heart. He had deliberately sampled all the raging fire waters of this torrid land of the tamale, including *tequila, mescal,* and *naranga*—the searing, explosive liquid that is said to be the most potent of all. And he had ended up, here on Tomasso's doorstep, with only a copper five-*centavo* piece in his pocket and a very large pain in his head.

The ache that he had set out to rid himself of last night, was still there in the region of his heart, too; and it was now more acute than ever.

A young woman, of course, had caused that. It was over two months ago that he had left her at her home in Pasadena, after she had very politely and very firmly declined to marry him. In the meantime he had been toiling night and day at his engineering job over in the wilds of Coahuila, in a frenzied effort to forget her; but it was no go.

She was more vivid now, indeed, than at any time since his farewell. He was seeing her always as she was on that final, gorgeous, California night; slim and dainty and lovely as the crimson roses that framed the bright bronze of her hair, as she stood there before the rose arbor in the scented moonlight.

And now she was to be married; within the week, in fact. Tommy Atherton had learned that yesterday morning in Laredo, where he had gone for his construction company. He could hardly have helped learning it, after the newspapers came down from San Antonio, for the announcement was blazoned forth in heavy headlines on front pages on every news stand, for all the world, including Tommy Atherton, to see.

Not that the girl, for all her loveliness and her family's social prominence, was so important to the newspaper boys. It was Gerald Vaughan, the man she had decided to marry, who was "news."

Vaughan was the reigning beau ideal of the films. He had rescued more

beautiful heroines, performed more valorous deeds—on celluloid—and caused more fluttering of feminine hearts, the world over, than any sheik in reel life. And so, of course, the newspapers considered any act of his in *real* life, especially a fourth marriage, important material.

It was the announcement of this coming wedding that had caused Tommy Atherton foolishly to toss up his very good job and go on a rampage through Nuevo Laredo. Vaughan! Tommy's normally agreeable features scowled. It was tragic enough for the young woman to be marrying any one but himself. But Vaughan! The man's escapades with women were notorious, and not pretty. His first wife had died in London of neglect and drugs; his second and third had divorced him for cruelty.

And yet, mused young Atherton in an effort to be sporting about it all, he could not blame Lila for being fascinated. Vaughan was the almost painfully handsome, devil-may-care type that always seemed to attract women, and he had prominence and wealth and distinction, of a kind, to bring to her. While T. R. Atherton, Construction Engineer, could only offer his prospects, and a love so overwhelming that it hurt.

Tommy Atherton attempted a sporting grin, but only succeeded in emitting a funny little pathetic groan. The other Thomas regarded him with a sympathetic and knowing chuckle.

"You have much big pain in the head, eh?" he observed. "*Tequila* is fine frien' at nighttime; but not so good frien' in the morning—no?"

"The pain in the head," young Atherton replied, "I can stand."

But he took the proffered chunk of ice and rubbed it over his burning skull and temples, then guzzled several more dirty dipperfuls of Tomasso's ice water. After that, Perez insisted on brewing him some of his black coffee, and added a precious egg to the tortillas spitting in the frying pan.

The ugly little town was stirring from its siesta; but, with his stomach full and the sun pouring bitter wrath over everything, young Atherton was feeling drowsy again. He was not accustomed to fire water orgies like last night's. But he rose to leave. Across the way, Mike O'Brien watched with apprehension and a wary eye. Another chemical combustion of *tequila* and *naranga*. and Tommy Atherton might be fatal to his premises.

"Where you go now?" Tomasso inquired.

"Where?" echoed Tommy wearily, appalled at the thought of years and years of life without Lila James.

"You will not go back across?"

"Never!" The firm jaw looked unyielding. "I'm done with my country. Never again will I even give three rousing cheers for the good old U. S. A.

"And you cannot go farther into Mexico—into the interior."

"Why can't I?" the other demanded.

"You have no passport. And anyway, back in the mountains are ver' wild life and bandits——"

Bandits! The young man's burning eyes lit. There was an idea! "Suppose I become one," he suggested. "The way I feel now, I could make this Pancho Villa gent look like the president of the Law and Order Society."

Tomasso chuckled his appreciation, as he gazed at the bronzed, deep-chested, athletic young man with the disarming smile and steel-blue eyes. The violent scenes of the night before returned to Tomasso most pleasurably. What a fighter this was! What a bandit he would make!

"But you have not a gun. No *puñal* —'dagger,'—even," observed Tomasso, grinning.

The other's flare of enthusiasm evaporated.

"That's right; I haven't a thing—not even a girl," he said with twofold disparagement, and turned to leave. But Tomasso pressed him back inside the doorway.

"You stay a while," he urged.

"But I have no money for you," objected the other.

"That is jus' why," explained Perez, "you should stay here. Mexico is a ver' evil place for Americanos what have no *dinero*. Except for Tomasso, how will you have for to eat and to smoke? And soon, with no passport, the *policia* will have you placed in the *cárcel*."

"Jail!" said Tommy with a thoughtful frown.

"For surely," replied Tomasso. "There is roads what must be fix and a new *cárcel* what must be construct. And how, save by prisoners, shall these be accomplish? But here you are—how you say—sit pretty." His ugly old face wrinkled in delight at his display of American idiom. He held forth a brown cigarette.

Tommy Atherton accepted it with softening eyes and again sat in the Perez doorway and pondered on the ways of man—and woman.

"Mike O'Brien," he reflected, "from my native land of the free and home of the brave, makes about thirty dollars off me, and when I'm as clean as a baby's conscience, he has me chucked out of his place, and then offers me a jitney to roll home on. While this little Mexican egg, from the land of the spree and home of the knave, from whom I never bought even a tamale, is trying to support me in the style to which I have been accustomed!"

He tried to jingle his solitary coin against nothing, and grinned wryly. Girl gone—money gone—job gone, he mused sleepily. Nothing, of course, really mattered, except the girl. With her he'd get another job and more money—everything. Without her——Oh, what did any damned thing matter. His eyes closed and his head sank to his chest.

An ancient flivver bounced over the bumpy dirt road, raising a cloud blanket, which, in the blazing sun, was like sifted gold. A Mexican soldier, small and squat, and like a bit out of comic opera in his grotesque uniform, eyed the American curiously. Mike O'Brien glared from across the way. Pedro, the barber, stared also, but with admiring curiosity as he recalled the battle deeds of the now peaceful warrior.

Tommy Atherton emitted a short snore then sat up with a start, as out of a nightmare, as a mongrel dog loped up and curled beside him. Out in Pasadena, mused young Atherton, they were probably getting ready for the wedding, which would be elaborate, of course. He tossed a careless smoke ring out toward a passing burro and shrugged, but his burning eyes looked sick.

"Better you sleep some more," suggested Tomasso. "You damn tired."

"Of everything," muttered the other Thomas.

He rose, stumbled a few steps to a pile of dirty sacking on the floor inside, and wearily flopped himself down. In three minutes he was again asleep.

In the vegetable stall of Mercy Sirio a gramophone of early vintage and squeaky mechanism was projecting a Spanish dance, a most provocative little composition of lively, lilting cadence and alluring air. For a beautiful moment Tommy Atherton found himself gliding gayly over the superb dance floor at the Ambassador in Los Angeles, a lovely lady in his arms and rapture in his heart. Then the crackling talk of the Mexicans next door brought him rudely back from his dream to the horrid realization of Nuevo Laredo and actuality.

He rose from his couch of rags,

swore softly in the dim light of Tomasso's little counter, and stepped to the doorway. The lights of the town were on, a garish blaze under the soft-blinking stars. It was ten o'clock Saturday night. The main thoroughfare, accordingly, was nearing the high tide of gay revelry.

Pedestrians and vehicles still streamed across the International Bridge, though other visitors, impatient or hopeful at the delay by the customs officials, were already trickling back to Texas. Mike O'Brien's place, like some of his noisy patrons, was already quite full; and the burly O'Brien industriously clinked his mounting profits into the cash register beside the big six-gun back of the bar, as *tequila, mescal,* and beer flowed freely. The orchestra at the Bohemian Club was in full blare; the well-dressed couples on the dance floor flitted through the soft shadows like fireflies, and the tables out back of the dancing space were thronged; while the Mexican bars that thickly dotted the street had long been active.

Yes, Nuevo Laredo was roused from its siesta.

Tomasso Perez had left his tiny stand for a moment; and Tommy Atherton, seizing the opportunity for escape from the hospitable little soul who so plainly could afford no hospitality at all, stepped out into the street.

A party of Americans leaving a glistening motor car to enter the dingy Mexican saloon a few doors on, pressed a hearty, if incoherent, invitation upon their fellow countryman. But he merely grinned and shook his head, which still felt a trifle oversize, and strolled aimlessly on, neither knowing nor caring, at the moment, about his ultimate destination.

After several blocks, where the lights grew less, he turned off the main street and down the Avenue Carranza, sauntered along the dusty road through the section where there are almost no lights at all, and continued out toward the district of the dance halls. Here, after blocks of gloom, the lights are many and bright; this is the final flare of life and gayety in the little Mexican town. For, a little farther on, habitation ends, and for miles into the interior there is nothing but waste country.

"Where do I go from here?" Tommy Atherton idly asked himself, peering out into the inscrutable blackness beyond the edge of the last, glimmering town lights. But the strident strains of American jazz from the first dance hall that burst upon him out of the dark, stopped further speculation.

The frame structure, long and low, with its street side unwalled and invitingly open, was already crowded with swaying couples. Three of the idle dancing girls—a vivid touch, with their dark coloring and flaming dresses so dear to the Mexican heart—left their chairs at the wall to flutter about the newcomer. He had left many *pesos* and gallantries, as well as destruction, in his wake the evening before.

The girls caught him by the arm and, in the musical bombardment of their native tongue, coaxed him to dance; but young Atherton good-humoredly put them off. Though this was one of the cheaper halls, where a dance cost but five cents, American, the lone coin in his trousers was only five cents Mexican.

However, an oil driller from the Texas fields, *mescal* mellowed to a jovial state, whirled one of them off the next moment; and an instant later a duo of Mexicans—one tipsy, frowsy and grotesque under his torn straw sombrero, the other dapper and suave—claimed the others.

The music stopped for an interval of rest and more coin collecting. Then it burst forth again as the three Mexican musicians swayed and scraped furiously to an even livelier air. The

motley crowd swirled by in swifter tempo. The laughter and oaths grew louder. A collision here, a dispute over girls there, brought fiery words, a threat or two in Spanish or vigorous Americanese. Again the flare of noise and color swept peacefully, if boisterously, on. It was Saturday night across the Rio Grande and joy was unconfined.

Tommy Atherton started on a tour of the other dance halls. While there is life, he recalled some one having said, there is hope; and this vivid, vulgar and most intriguing burst of life was the last he would see for many miles, once he left the dusty edge of the little town.

At the Paris, one of the larger places, an incipient clash between a miner, up from the interior, and a cavalryman in citizen's attire, down from Fort McIntosh, caused a mild stir of interest; but ended in peace. It was in the darkness of the road, near the so-called Marble Floor, the best known dance hall of all, that he came upon the first bit of real excitement.

A girl, slim and lithe and wondrously alluring, even in the half light, was struggling with a man, attempting to leave him. The man, his large form bulking formidable in the shadows, appeared tolerantly amused at her efforts and spoke jokingly in Spanish as he held her arm in a firm grasp.

Tommy Atherton shrugged his own impressive shoulders. A Mexican dandy and his light-o'-love in a difference of opinion, he mused, were his idea of nothing to interfere with; especially south of the border, in this district, where knives are as handy as toothpicks, and even fair ladies, misinterpreting motives of well-meaning, innocent bystanders, can become quite tigerish. Moreover, it was certainly no affair of his; and his own troubles of the heart were plenty.

He hummed a bar from "Fra Diavolo," and gazed idly up at the star-sprinkled heavens; but the next instant the smile and air were wiped from his lips by a cry from the smaller of the weaving figures in the shadows across the way. The cry, very musical though a little desperate, was in English and was most familiar.

Tommy Atherton's eyes fairly popped in his amazement. And the amazement increased at sound of another voice, a male one, that came the next instant, evidently in response to the first. It was also in English—cool, resonant, self-assured and, to Tommy Atherton, very disagreeable. It came from the Marble Floor, and it was the voice of Gerald Vaughan—no other.

Now what in blazes, Tommy wondered, were Lila James and Gerald Vaughan doing in Nuevo Laredo—the one in a scuffle with a large man in the road, the other in the dance hall near by? The silent question was partly answered the next moment, as Vaughan bounded from the blaze of the dance hall to the murk of the road in his best Hollywood manner.

"What's wrong?" he demanded imperiously of the large man. Then, at sight of the struggling girl, he stared in annoyance. "Good Lord, Lila!" he exclaimed petulantly, "what are you doing out here? Didn't I tell you to stay back at the Bohemian Club garden, where you'd not be annoyed; and that I'd be back for you?"

"Gerald! Thank heavens!" breathed the relieved girl. "This man has been annoying me."

Vaughan's haughty eyes rested darkly upon the other man.

"I'll settle with him in a moment. But what made you come out here? Didn't I tell you I'd be back for you? Didn't I?"

"You did," Miss James replied, nettled at her fiancé's tone. "You said you'd be back at ten o'clock. And it's almost eleven now."

"Well, my director suggested looking the district over for atmosphere, before they take in those final shots. And I can't allow a few paltry minutes to interfere with my art," he retorted. "Anyway, I don't suppose it would have hurt you so very much to have waited, would it?"

"I don't suppose so," she replied, flushing as his sulkiness and the crowd from the dance hall increased. "And I didn't see anything so awful in looking around a bit in the meantime."

"Well, it might have been serious," Vaughan snapped. "Out alone in this district! It's damned lucky I happened to be here."

He gazed at the still-collecting crowd with a satisfied eye, despite his temper. It was all so like one of his typical picture scenes: lovely lady in distress —large villain to be chastised—himself dashing out exactly in the nick of time, with an admiring crowd gaping its admiration.

His disdainful eyes rested threateningly upon the big ruffian, who had momentarily released his hold upon Miss James. "I ought to give *you* a thorough thrashing, you blackguard!" he declared. "I would, too, if this lady wasn't present." He placed a hand on the girl's arm and turned to move off to a near-by motor car.

The trouble was, though, that this didn't seem to be an orthodox picture villain; the blackguard not only refused to succumb to the haughty tone and darkling eyes, but again grasped the free arm of the girl. He seemed quite a devil of a young fellow himself; powerful; of striking good looks, in an animal sort of way; a bit dandified even, in his cream-colored flannel trousers, lavender silk shirt and expensive ten-gallon Panama hat. And he was Mexican; which meant that he believed he had an honest right to the company of an unescorted girl, met with in a district like this; especially if this girl, who had not only approached him in the dimness of the Avenue Carranza, but who had also inquired the way to the notorious dance hall district, and then had voluntarily accompanied him there. That this particular girl was not of his country and seemed now to be changing her preference to a man of her own country, did not, in his mind, alter the case at all. This other man might take her only if he could take her by force.

And that is what Gerald Vaughan attempted. He roughly grasped the arm of the Mexican. The latter laughed good-naturedly and easily released himself. Vaughan then loosed an angry epithet and tugged at the fellow's arm; whereat a ham of a hand was placed rudely against his silk-shirt front, flexed muscles suddenly straightened, and Gerald found his feet suddenly gone from under him, in a most unherolike manner.

Startled, chagrined, and mad with humiliation, he picked himself from the dust at the slippered feet of one of the dancing girls and made a rush and a lunge at his adversary. But a great fist, at the end of a beautiful forearm that curved smartly in a short arc technically known as a hook, caromed off Gerald's good-looking chin. And that, it appeared, was that. Vaughan obviously had enough of combat right there. He picked himself up again, ruefully rubbed his chin and glanced about anxiously.

"Isn't there any police protection at all in this rotten country?" he inquired. And when no one replied, he disappeared in the crowd to seek it.

Tommy Atherton, across the street in a half dozen jumps after his momentary amazement, was an unobtrusive spectator for these few swift moments. Though he was yearning to approach and speak to Lila James, he had told her in Pasadena that she would never see him again; and Vaughan had

seemed to have the situation well in hand, until this final moment.

But now things were looking serious. Already the fellow was moving off with the helpless and now thoroughly alarmed girl through the admiring crowd. They were cheering him now, impulsively, affectionately. The man clearly was well known to them, a real personage in their eyes, quite apart from his conquest of Gerald Vaughan.

Tommy Atherton's burning eyes grew very sober, and a great fear for the weakly struggling girl seized him. The crowd clearly would brook no interference with this local hero in an affair of this kind. The man's name rose higher and higher on the lips of excited Mexicans as he edged through the throng.

"Rubolo—Rubolo—Rubolo!" The name came from volatile throats in a great salvo of adulation. A personage? Why the fellow was an idol!

Then, in a sudden flash of recollection, came the answer. Of course he was an idol! Rubolo! Why this could be none other than Porfirio Rubolo, the heavyweight boxing champion of Mexico! His name had appeared occasionally in the sport prints; and a picture very like this chap had been published only recently in the rotogravure section of a Los Angeles Sunday paper.

A ray of hope came to Tommy Atherton. Rubolo, the champion of Mexico. That explained the great acclaim and that very snappy left hook. Though a Mexican, he was accustomed to fighting with his hands; and, in the pride of his fistic title and accomplishments, he might be induced to fight in that way for his fair and still struggling companion. It all would depend upon how much of a sportsman Rubolo was.

Tommy Atherton burst through the dissolving crowd, knocking indignant individuals right and left as he came up to the departing pair.

"Just a moment, señor!" he cried, catching the man by the forearm.

"Tommy!" Lila James whirled about, the velvet blue of her eyes suddenly bright with amazement. "Oh, Tommy!" she gasped, joyfully eying the hatless, rather grimy and determined-looking young man.

"Lila!" He grasped her hand, and grinned encouragement, as the great Rubolo turned with a look of annoyance.

"Yes?" he said shortly.

"This lady," said Tommy, "is of my country and a very great friend."

The great Rubolo shrugged.

"Even so," he replied, courteously enough, after an inspection of this other American. "But she comes with Rubolo, señor, not with you. I have meet the lady first."

"But she is not willing to go with you. And she is not a lady to be accosted on the public street," said Tommy. "You must see that."

The great Rubolo shrugged again.

"That is what you tell to get her from me, eh? But it will not work, my frien'. The lady, it so happens, is the one what accost *me* on the public street—alone, out in this kind of district.

"Is this not so?" he inquired of the lady in question.

"Why—why—it's true that I spoke to you," admitted Miss James, "but I——"

"And it is out in this part of the Avenue Carranza that it is happen?" he persisted.

"Well, yes," she truthfully replied. "But of course I didn't know——"

"And you have accompany me here of your own free willingness?"

"Why, yes. But I had no *earthly* idea that you would——"

Porfirio Rubolo's shrug was like a period of finality to the entire matter.

"You see"—he stated with a smile of triumph, "herself, the lady, have

admit it." He turned to leave with her.

The American detained him, vigorously.

"Just another minute," he insisted.

"Yes?" said the other courteously.

"You are Rubolo, the boxing champion of Mexico?"

Rubolo bowed.

"And so you should not be afraid to fight any man—any amateur—with the gloves."

"Afraid, señor!" The tone was imperious.

"I knew it," said the wily Tommy. "I knew you must be a courageous man. And you are, of course, a gentleman?"

Again the great Rubolo bowed.

"Then," stated Tommy Atherton, with a great show of confidence, but a most anxious ear for the reply, "the whole affair becomes nicely simplified, señor. I will fight you, with the gloves, to a finish. And the one who remains conscious and able to do so, shall escort this lady from here."

The big Mexican examined the other curiously, a puzzled look in his quick, black eyes.

"You are not what is called a professional boxer?" he asked, clearly amazed.

"I have never been inside professional ropes in my life," stated the American, "though I am familiar with the gloves."

"And you would fight Rubolo, the champion of all of Mexico?"

"For this lady, yes," replied Atherton, a fond light in his eyes as he gazed longingly at her.

"But you are not even of my weight, señor. You are the strong athlete—I see that; but me—I am real heavyweight, nearly two hundred pounds."

"I am a light heavyweight——" admitted the American, "about a hundred and seventy-five. But I have fought bigger men. I went out of my class and took the heavyweight title by a knock-out in three rounds, at the Olympics two years ago. It will be a fight," he assured the other.

The great Rubolo merely smiled at that.

"Señor," he said with quiet sincerity, "you are a ver' brave man. I will fight with you. But it will be no use." He shook his great head a bit sadly. "You shall see. It will be Rubolo who shall escort the beautiful Americano lady away."

He turned and spoke sharply to a prosperous-looking Mexican. The latter nodded, grinning with delight, and hurried into the dance hall, replying to the crackling volley of Spanish questions en route. The news sped swiftly through the entire district, and in an amazingly short time that part of the road was congested with a throng that appeared to have dropped from nowhere. Other dance halls were deserted; and word was already on the way to the center of the town.

Rubolo, the great Rubolo, was to box with the smiling but destructive Americano of the evening before!

Arrangements were quickly made. It would be in the dance hall, it was decided, on the rough-board space at one end of the dance floor.

"But the gloves!" cried some one in dismay.

"Mike O'Brien's got gloves," informed an American—a hard-visaged young man with a cauliflowered ear and flattened nose.

An auto dispatched to O'Brien's place returned with O'Brien as well as his gloves; also Pedro, the barber, and Tomasso Perez. Others, it developed, were on the way.

In the dance-hall building the American of the thickened ears immediately tendered his services to his fellow countryman.

"I'm "Bat" Harrigan," he explained, "and I know this racket. Lemme swing a towel on ya, kid. I was in on the

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wind-up over at Fort McIntosh on Thursday, ya know." Tommy Atherton didn't know, but he gladly accepted the services and the introduction, as well as those of two more Americans, an oil driller in boots and mammoth Stetson, and a grizzled old miner up from Mexico City. Three fluttering and adoring Mexicans already had the great Rubolo stripped to the waist. And in another minute the gloves were being adjusted to the hands of both.

There was little else in the way of preparation. The crowd itself—a fantastic looking press of humanity, with Mexicans greatly in the majority—formed the ring. An English rancher, favorably known, it appeared on both sides of the Rio Grande, was referee. A funny little Mexican soldier and a gaunt Texas Ranger who had chanced by were jointly to hold a watch and call time. When some one finally located a pair of battered water buckets and two empty *mescal* bottles, to accompany the flour sacks to be used in lieu of towels, the stage was set.

"Just a tip, kid, before ya start," said Bat Harrigan, with a final tug at a glove lace. "Don't take this Rubolo for any man's sap. A title like the 'champ of Mexico' might sound kinda comical. But this lad ain't—if he socks in that right hand of his. He can't box; but kid, he can fight, if you give him any chance a-tall. Don't do it. His left hand is a laugh, like this Firpo's. But he kicks with that right just like the old bull, too. And he counters with it a lot faster. He knocked Joe Manning kicking over in San Antone. And this Manning goes ten nice innings with Stribling once. So ya can see this big Mex ain't nobody's push-over."

The other nodded and glanced across at his foe. That dark-skinned giant looked more formidable than ever, with his hairy barrel chest and powerful arms and shoulders.

Bat Harrigan, interpreting the glance, grinned.

"You ain't such a sick-looking egg yourself, kid," he stated, taking in his charge's beautifully proportioned figure. "But he's got a ton on you in weight."

"About twenty pounds," said Tommy Atherton.

"Well, just cut him down to your size," chuckled Harrigan. "The bigger they are the louder they sound when you drop 'em."

"When you drop 'em," echoed Mike O'Brien, who was betting on the Mexican. "You got something real to fight now, me lad."

Tommy Atherton yawned. But the insolence of his light blue eyes faded to anxiety, as he glanced at Lila James. That young woman's face had gone white when she realized what was to happen. She bent over him with something like pain in her own soft eyes.

"Tommy, you mustn't do this," she cried softly. "I can't let you."

"I've got to. It's the only chance you've got, Lila," he replied.

"But he's a professional fighter. An awful fighter, Tommy. Even the Americans think so. You can hear them all around. They say a man he fought with in Monterey died after it. Tommy, I *can't* let you do it!"

Tommy grinned reassuringly.

"Oh, Tommy!" she breathed, her eyes moist. And she stooped and pressed her lips to his grimy forehead.

Tommy's lips were drawn tight, as Bellingham, the English rancher, called time. The beat of the orchestra drum, in lieu of a gong, followed immediately. Bat Harrigan, with a heavy slap on the back as he whisked the flour sack from his shoulders, dropped his final word of instruction into his charge's ear.

"Go in and knock hell out of him, kid," he begged, "and for Pete's sake watch that right hand."

Young Atherton watched it as he glided from his chair to touch gloves with his foe, and he watched it as he shot a swift but careful jab that landed high on the rushing Mexican's head. And always after that, in his wary circling about the bronzed giant; in his quick feinting of glove or shoulders or body; in his snakelike, accurate, stabbing leads; in the swift, savage, damaging flurry of battle that usually followed; and in the wrestling, ripping, glove-digging and tiring clinches; he watched that right hand.

Cautiously, warily and sometimes fearfully, he watched it; for melting violet eyes in a white face, rather than his own fate, were always in his mental vision. He must not be knocked out.

He feinted a jab. Rubolo's awkward left glove brushed past his ear, he feinted with his shoulders. The great left arm pawed harmlessly again. He feinted once more, and as the other's left glove brushed past his ear, he jabbed the big fellow twice. Rubolo smiled and rushed again, his right glove drawn back, waiting. The other slid aside deftly and hooked him solidly on the ear as he passed. It was the first hard punch of the fight; and a ripple of American cheers rose. Again the Mexican bored in, swung his left glove harmlessly, and they were locked in a clinch, with the drum beat booming the end of the round as they tugged and hauled at each other.

It was a careful, harmless session. Mike O'Brien grunted disapproval. Spattering Mexican comment invited more action. Rubolo, leaning back negligently in his chair while a second soused his face with a dripping rag, looked bored. Bat Harrigan, briskly sponging Tommy Atherton's unstruck features, grinned.

"Nice work, kid," he commented. "Keep taking it careful."

The second round was faster. For almost two minutes the American glided in and out of range—jabbing, ducking, feinting, jabbing again and occasionally, at a safe opening, hooking a glove solidly to the other's face or body. Then, near the end of the round as they were coming out of a clinch, the powerful right arm shot forward and over, like a swinging club. Atherton rolled his head with the blow and escaped serious damage by a half inch; but when he went to his corner at the drum beat, a red stream trickled down over his chin from cut lips. It was first blood for the Mexican and it brought forth a most tremendous Mexican roar.

"Close, huh?" grinned Bat Harrigan, as he washed the blood away. "That right's nearly all he's got, but it's a lot."

The third and fourth rounds were still faster, as the American, timing the other's rushes perfectly, shot the dark head back again and again with solid left-hand stabs. He was getting the big man's range nicely and at every wide opening, after that ponderous right hand had swung harmlessly by, he leaped in swiftly, with a slashing, two-fisted attack for the brief moment that the other was off balance.

Once in the fifth round, and twice in the seventh period, the smaller man felt that dynamic right glove. But each time, though he was jarred and hurt, he escaped real damage by fractions of a second, as he partly blocked, or instinctively rolled his head with the blows.

In the tenth period, catching Rubolo badly off balance as a wild right and then a left swing were widely missed, Atherton sprang in close with a furious, slashing, two-handed attack that had the Americans roaring for a knockout. But though the big man was spitting blood from a gashed mouth, and his split eye was now badly cut, as they tugged about in the subsequent clinch, his opponent knew that a knock-

out—of his foe—was far from imminent.

The giant Mexican was as powerful and enduring as ever. Tommy Atherton realized this as those powerful arms twisted and easily pushed him about in the clinches, sometimes fairly lifting him from the floor. He knew it each time one of those swinging, swishing clublike right-hand punches swept past his jaw by a hairbreadth, or landed on his dripping body just a few inches from a vital spot. And he knew it each time he looked into the black, piercing eyes and found them still gleaming with a faint smile—a patient, waiting, very confident smile.

And back in his corner, though his seconds were jubilant, young Atherton was very sober. He must knock this Hercules out; and ten rounds had already passed, with his foe badly outscored in every one of them; yet he was no nearer to a knock-out than when they had started. Besides, the clinches were wearing him down much more than they were the big fellow. It would never do.

In a limited, decision fight, yes. In fifteen, twenty—even twenty-five rounds, with a definite limit in sight, he might, by being very careful, by conserving all his energy, have the luck to avoid that one right-hand blow that, placed on the right spot, meant certain oblivion. And by continual outscoring of his man in the meantime, he might take the decision.

But there could be no decision except the automatic decision of a knock-out. Rubolo, the fighter, was eager to fight; and so far Tommy Atherton, the scientific boxer and fighter both, had not allowed him to fight. But now, Tommy's quickly working brain decided that chance would have to be taken. For he must quickly begin to really hurt this young giant. And every extra ounce put into his heavier punching meant, the American knew, that much more chance for that fearful, dynamic right hand of his foe. The thing seemed a paradox of a problem. He simply must not take any chance of being knocked out himself. And yet the necessity for stopping his opponent, as the only way of winning, meant that he must give him much more of a chance at stopping him.

At Bellingham's call of time he stepped briskly from his chair; met Rubolo over near his corner; feinted once, then again, to draw the customary rush. And when it came, the Mexican was, as he expected, greeted with the usual quick, stinging but harmless jabs to the face. Rubolo patiently smiled as the American glided away; then he set himself and rushed again. Once more the American jabbed him, then hooked his body sharply with his right. Again the Mexican smiled and waited for the foe to slip back, his own hands carelessly at his side, as the edge of his attention became momentarily dulled.

In that moment Tommy Atherton shot his right glove up and across to the big man's open jaw with every ounce of force in him. Rubolo staggered, for the briefest moment. Bat Harrigan and the other seconds were calling fervently, "Go get him now. Nail him again." The American contingent were roaring out a joyful blast. Tommy Atherton did nail him again, and again; and then once more. Much bigger men had dropped like felled oxen under just one of these right-hand smashes. But their jaws were not made of granite, or oak, or whatever it was that Bat Harrigan, raving in the American corner, swore composed that solid jaw of Porfirio Rubolo.

The Mexican staggered another step, his eyes dimmed the merest trifle; and the next instant, with his opportunity gone, Tommy Atherton felt himself infolded in a bearlike grasp. Rubolo, plainly hurt, was instinctively clinch-

ing. And when the American looked into his eyes, as Bellingham tried to tug them apart, the dimness had left those eyes and Rubolo was smiling—faintly, a bit admiringly, and just as confidently as before.

"What held that guy up?" demanded Harrigan blasphemously as the drum beat sent the fighters back to their corners. "You nailed him three beauts, right smack on the old button. And all he done was wobble a little. That gorilla just ain't human. Well, work him that way some more, kid."

The American tried to work him that way in the very next round; but this time the crafty Mexican's attention was never dulled for an instant. For, though his arms seemed to dangle as listlessly as before, when Tommy Atherton glided away after stabbing and hooking him, one of them lashed out at the same instant that Tommy Atherton's right cross did; and though Tommy leaped in to his prey like a tiger, he bounced back like a lamb. Like a lifeless, brutally felled lamb, in fact.

For both had started their rights at the same instant and Rubolo's, catching his man solidly for the first time during the fight, had beaten the other to the punch, sending his opponent across the open space to the corner, and leaving him there limp and bloody.

Bellingham was across to the corner in a jump, his arm rising and falling monotonously. Bat Harrigan was pleading with the inert form. The oil driller and the weathered old miner were cursing fearfully. The Mexicans, a mad, gesticulating mob, were shattering the hot night air with loud, reverberating roars.

"Three—four—five," Bellingham was droning. As his arm lifted for the sixth time Bat Harrigan groaned. Lila James, staring wide-eyed at the blood stream trickling from the half-turned face on to the floor, shivered a little and covered her white face with shaking hands.

"He's gone," said Harrigan softly.

But as the English rancher tolled seven, the figure stirred. At eight it was on one knee, crazily shaking its head, and at nine it was up on both feet—shaky, wobbling, with a crimson stream pouring from battered lips.

It was animal instinct and nothing else that sent protecting gloves before the gory features and guarding arms in front of the body, as the big Mexican started his rush. And it was Rubolo's anxiety and consequent wildness that saved Tommy Atherton from the flurry of swings that rained about him. The next moment he was desperately clinging to the bronzed hulk, and in the precious moments of that clinch, his head cleared.

A short hook from the too-anxious Mexican merely grazed his temple. A circling left glove caught him high on the chest as they broke. Then, as Rubolo deliberately set himself for one of his clublike right-hand smashes, the American sprang to the attack like a wounded tiger. He sensed that dangerous right glove starting, ducked under it by instinct, and, with the Mexican's body wide open to a counter, Tommy Atherton swung his own right glove with every ounce of force left in him.

And this time it was more than instinct that sent that right cross for the body instead of the jaw. The American, in this last desperate rally, even as he was ducking and starting his own punch at the same time, remembered the resisting power of that bronze jaw.

His glove sank into the great torso just above the encircling trunks with a sickening impact. Rubolo's thick arms dropped; his lips gaped in a look of agony. Tommy Atherton's left glove shot into the same spot, and his right glove followed. It took the final ounce of power and stamina he possessed,

for he was wobbling on shaky legs himself.

But it was enough. The big Mexican's chin sank to his hairy chest; and then, suddenly, he collapsed to the floor. The thing was over. The great Rubolo, conscious, but unable to rise on temporarily paralyzed legs, gasped, groaned, and rolled over on his face, while Bellingham slowly counted him out.

For many seconds there was silence, the crowd merely gaping amazedly with the suddenness of it all. Then the American contingent burst into an ear-splitting roar. Bat Harrigan leaped forward and caught the staggering Tommy Atherton in his arms, fairly dragging him to his chair.

The next minute Lila James was kneeling beside him, softly crying as she pressed trembling lips to his crimson face.

It was about six o'clock the next afternoon, when Gerald Vaughan, who had recovered his customary self-assurance, called at the hotel in Laredo, Texas, where Lila James and her mother had stopped while he was over in Mexico, for the final scenes of his latest motion picture.

It had been a strenuous day for Gerald. He had beaten up three husky villains in a great Mexican barroom scene, and he was tired. But he confronted the desk clerk with his usual aplomb, as he asked for Mrs. James and her lovely daughter.

"Mrs. James and her daughter," the clerk replied, "checked out about two o'clock."

"Checked out!" Gerald's eyes stared his amazement.

"Checked out," the courteous clerk repeated.

"You mean they've left the city? Why, that simply can't be possible!" said Vaughan.

"But it is, sir," insisted the clerk. "They left the hotel with Mr. Atherton."

"Atherton!" Gerald almost screamed the name. "What was Atherton doing down here in Laredo, I'd like to know."

"He stopped here for a night on business for his firm, I understand. But now he's on his way back to his job, that bridge job they're doing some place in Mexico." The clerk smiled at a memory. "In fact," he continued, "his chief—a very profane old gentleman—came down here to get him back, it seems, and luckily came upon him this morning as he asked for mail."

"But didn't Miss James and her mother leave any word for me?" inquired the aghast Gerald.

"Miss James left this note." The clerk produced an envelope from under his counter. Gerald Vaughan read it with crimsoning face.

GERALD: I came very near making a horrible mistake. But I discovered it in time.
LILA ATHERTON.

"Lila *Atherton!*" shouted Vaughan.

"Oh," said the courteous clerk, "I forgot to mention it, Mr. Vaughan, but Miss James and Mr. Atherton were married at noon. They're on their way to his job in Mexico. And Mrs. James is going to Pasadena."

And as the ex-fiancé left the desk, the telephone girl, who had once clipped his picture from the magazines, chewed her gum more slowly and smiled.

"That guy might be a hero in the movies," she observed, "but he's just a fade-out when it comes to gettin' a swell dame away from this Atherton kid."

The Champion Grows Reckless

By William Hemmingway

Author of "New Fists for Old," "The Champion Looks Ahead," Etc.

The real name of the author of this boxing article must remain unmentioned, but he is an authority on the subject of the ring. Long before the day of the recent pugilistic duet in Chicago, Mr. Hemmingway called the turn on it. The present article is interesting for its calm, authoritative estimate of the Chicago fight and the outlook for the future.

IF we are to have bigger and better fights, the good old firm of Dempsey and Tunney will make them. That is the principal fact outstanding since the near-three-million-dollar contest at Chicago. The fight spectacle, as pointed out in these pages months ago, was lifted out of its native mire by these fierce but courteous lads in their first battle and fixed on a new plane as one of the cleanest and richest amusement enterprises in the world. Its golden prospects to-day are better than ever, thanks to the battle of Chicago.

The members of this prosperous amusement firm were at daggers' points for a while after the last tap of the gong and would have liked to knock each other off the face of the earth; but time and the prospect of millions of dollars reconciled them. What fighting man could ever become so offended that he would be too proud to fight?

To those who enjoy the study of the human comedy as well as mere fighting, the newest developments in the boxing business present a fascinating picture, quite as thrilling as the marvels of aviation, or the magic of the movies and of radio. They form one of the strangest phenomena in this age of wonders. The scene is sadly different now from that after the Battle of the Sesquicentennial, when Dempsey did not wait for the referee to award his championship to Tunney, but himself stumbled over, shook hands with Tunney and congratulated him on his victory.

But this time Dempsey swore he was cheated out of his chance to win by a bungle between referee and timekeeper which gave Tunney four seconds of extra time to gather his wits after Dempsey had knocked him flat in that memorable seventh round.

Tunney honestly and properly admitted that the knockdown was a snorter, but insisted that he could have got up and protected himself any time after the count of four seconds. I believe him.

But could he? The same decent respect for the opinion of mankind that Thomas Jefferson wrote into the Declaration will force these gladiators together again, so that they can answer the question decisively one way or the other. The weight of evidence given by many competent eyewitnesses and the moving pictures favors the belief that Tunney could have got up within six seconds after he was dropped and gone on to victory. Of course, he did exactly right in taking all the time the rules allowed. But when did mere rules or weight of evidence have the slightest influence on the feelings of the crowd? The answer is—never! Some millions of our fellow citizens worship Dempsey and love to nurse a grievance; they protest that Jack was unfairly deprived of his rights, and they won't be happy till he gets it—"it" being either the championship or a knockout. Pretty soft for Tex Rickard. And another million and a half in the pockets of the fighters.

Tunney has won multitudes of new admirers by his wisdom and courage and quick thinking in the ring at Chicago. People have known for years that he was clever. Up to that fateful seventh round they did not know whether he could "take it" and come back fighting. Now they know that he has not only wonderful power of recuperation from a crashing blow, but that he has high courage and the ability to think clearly under fire.

Flat on his back, struggling up on one knee, then propping himself upright on weary legs and skirmishing for more time, he acted out the answer of John Paul Jones to the captain of the *Serapis:* "I haven't begun to fight yet."

Incidentally it may be mentioned that he did not accept Dempsey's pathetic invitation to "Come on in and fight!" until he was well rested and ready. Then he came in with a vengeance.

So, between the new admirers of Dempsey as a man who has suffered wrongs and the new admirers of Champion Tunney as a man who can think and act gamely and wisely when only half conscious, there is a demand to have these two settle the question of supremacy which will grow into the promotion of another "gate" of three or four million dollars—and of countless millions of words.

To get an accurate view of what happened in the dramatic seventh round at Chicago, with the light it throws on the future, we have to go back to what happened after Tunney outfought Dempsey at Philadelphia and follow the story to its climax. A game beaten champion always gains popularity. Defeat and his manly acknowledgment of it won hosts of friends for Dempsey.

They made the excuse that years of soft living, without battles, had left him a mere remnant of himself, a "hollow shell," as they phrased it. He made no excuse for himself, but went home to luxurious Hollywood to think things over. He lived right.

Early in the spring he went into the mountains of Southern California, and for many weeks chopped wood and dug earth and lived the simple life of a day laborer—that is, if you can imagine a day laborer simple enough to do three days' work every day. Soon he felt strong as a bullock.

When Dempsey was quite sure that he had recovered his old self, he made the match to fight Josef Paul Cukoschay, the brave Polish boy from Boston and the United States navy whose ring name is Jack Sharkey—a tribute to gallant old Tom. (There is one of the most honest and plucky men that ever drew on a glove. On the morning after Jeffries had bashed in his left side, Tom, stretched on a bed of pain, and coughing every time he breathed and the broken ribs stabbed his lung, said to me: "Next time I fight Jeff I'll kill him.")

But the great name did not save the Polish boy. He had speed to burn, and had he shown real intelligence he was fast enough to have kept out of harm's way and outpointed Dempsey. But, consumed with vanity, he dashed in to overwhelm the ex-champion and traded blows with him, toe to toe. The man does not live who can do that with impunity. Dempsey pounded him in the body—some of the blows going below the belt—and knocked him out without much trouble.

It was really ring suicide on the part of Sharkey. He had no head. His seconds begged him to fight at long range, but he said, "I've taken all he's got, and he can't hurt me," and ran in to meet his fate. If—an utter impossibility—but *if* some one had given him a million to do it, he could not have better played into Dempsey's hands.

Having beaten Jack Sharkey, Dempsey was entitled to another fight with his conqueror, not only because he had beaten the sailor but because he had shown a big improvement over his form and condition at Philadelphia. Meanwhile the champion had trained faithfully for months, and when both men arrived at Chicago a few weeks before the battle they were as fit as they could be, Dempsey having the additional advantage of recent battle practice—which, by the way, is more helpful than working a thousand rounds with mere sparring partners.

As the day of the fight drew nigh, one felt a great menace in the heavy lakeside air. The sure-thing gamblers, who since the days of "Old Figg" have been the bane of boxing, were betting on Dempsey, hammering the price down to six to five, something unprecedented in a championship. Chicago and the mid-West generally favored Dempsey's chances, largely out of sympathy with his gameness, and also perhaps because Tunney has never gone out of his way to court public favor.

It was apparent, too, that the pressure of big money was all on the side of the challenger; for if by any chance he could be declared the winner, then Tunney would be entitled to the opportunity to get his title back. And such a match as that, with each man a champion and the greatest crown in pugilism at stake, would fill a stadium far bigger than any that has yet been built.

Right there is the rock on which the boxing business may yet be wrecked; for with such enormous sums in the balance, the money interest far outweighs the interest of sport. When millions are the prize, men will crowd in to grab them, fairly or unfairly, whether in the ring or oil field or mining camp.

Beneath the smooth surface of the highly organized show at Chicago, with its army of ushers and thousands of police to preserve order, lurked the danger that some desperate trick might be tried to swing the battle in favor of the "wise money." Probably not one fight fan out of a thousand ever guesses the stratagems and shifts that may be resorted to by the gangs out to win at any price.

In the dim past a gang of sure-thing men broke into the ring at Farnborough, where John C. Heenan, the "Benicia Boy"—American—had Tom Sayers, champion of England, on the verge of a knockout, and robbed him of his victory. When the American, Jake Kilrain, beat Jem Smith, champion of England, sure-thing gamblers hit Jake in the head with bottles and knuckle-dusters and deprived him of a knockout.

Those who were at Carson City, Nevada, on the memorable St. Patrick's Day of 1897, will never forget the small but deadly squad arrayed in each fighter's corner. Back of Corbett was the courtly and cold-eyed Wyatt Earp, famous for his quickness on the draw and accompanied by a group of noted

two-gun men, all ready to shoot at a moment's notice. In Fitzsimmons' corner was "Bat" Masterson, the greatest gun fighter in the West, former marshal of Dodge City. Bat had a trusty crowd of hair-trigger experts with him. One bad move would start the fireworks. I was all set to dive under John L. Sullivan at the first crack. They couldn't shoot through John L.

When Corbett's swift rights to the short ribs had weakened Fitz so that he fell to the floor in the sixth round, Fitz clung to him and slithered down Corbett's body and legs like a boy down the trunk of a tree, and at last settled on his right knee. He still clung to Corbett's left leg with both hands. Corbett dared not break his grasp, for fear that Fitz's desperate seconds would yell "Foul!" and his gunmen open fire. Earp's men would shoot, too, and the middle of the ring between the hostile armies would be—well, unpleasant.

Corbett turned and begged Referee Siler to break Fitz's grasp. Siler approached slowly and with caution. He did not lay one finger on Fitz, but politely requested him to let go. It was no place for sudden movements. All this took time. Fitz let go—and only then did Referee Siler begin to count the ten. Fitz got up at nine, greatly refreshed by the extra eight or ten seconds' delay before the counting, and Corbett began to slow down to defeat.

With these and scores of similar instances in mind, and determined to save this match from any taint of foul play, which would kill the boxing business, the Illinois State Athletic Commission and Promoter Tex Rickard took the most elaborate precautions against any possible rough work at the ringside. Also, since great pressure would be brought to bear on the referee if he were named in advance, that important official was not chosen until the men were about to step into the ring. Even then an honest and unterrified referee might make a mistake; so the commission appointed two judges to serve with the referee in deciding the winner if the issue were close; and, in case of appeal from the joint decision of the three, the commission itself reserved the power to settle all questions.

Several long sessions, which Tunney's and Dempsey's managers attended, were devoted to setting forth the rules to govern the contest. It really seemed as if nothing had been overlooked to insure a good, honest fight. Everybody was satisfied, except perhaps those morons who always try to make themselves sound wise by saying, "Ah-h-h! The fight's crooked!"

Dempsey faced the harder task: not only to try to recapture the supremacy he had lost at Philadelphia, but to overcome the age-old tradition that a defeated champion never comes back. Yet he was so confident that he remarked: "I'll knock that blinkety-blink bookworm for a loop!" Tunney's job was easier: simply to hold his own.

Then some deluded adviser, trying to make a noise like a master of strategy, persuaded Dempsey to publish an open letter to Tunney, urging him to confess that before the Philadelphia battle Tunney had engaged a diplomat named Booboo Hoohoo or something like that to win it for him by a dirty deal. This charge was so ridiculous that it fell of its own weight. Its only effect was to make Tunney angry—which probably is all its author intended to do. If he were a little older, more experienced in the ways of the parasites who infest the lives of fighting men, he would have regarded the open letter simply as "one of those things," and let it go at that. Unhappily, Tunney flared up at the attack on his good name, and made up his mind to get even by knocking out Dempsey. At Philadelphia he had contented himself with outboxing him.

The fact may shock those who believe that the cave-man abysmal-brute type of boxer is the best, but it is none the less a fact that no man can fight his best when he is angry. Think of it: would you like to be operated on by an angry surgeon, or to have an angry lawyer fight your case in court, or to live in a house put up by an infuriated builder? Never. The scowling demon of destruction, with the foam of rage dripping from his gleaming fangs, goes over big in the movies, but is an easy mark when he comes in under the Queensbury rules.

Who can forget the expression on Jim Corbett's face as he met the glaring, rushing John L. Sullivan in the ring at New Orleans? He had goaded John into fury a moment before. Corbett's brows were drawn low as he studied the giant tearing in to destroy him as he had destroyed men by the hundreds. At the first onslaught Corbett leaped lightly backward at least six feet. Again, again, shortening the distance each successive time, and always intently studying the ferocious force that plunged after him.

He did not try to hit John L. for the first three rounds. To me Corbett seemed like an ambitious young engineer trying to build a bridge to fame and fortune across a fierce and roaring river, measuring the strength of the flood, estimating the danger of reefs, quicksands and currents that threatened his project.

From then until he delivered the knock-out, Corbett never lost that look of the keen, eager student, alive to all the perils that he faced and determined to triumph in spite of them. But never one gleam of anger. Anger is always a liability.

So Tunney played into the hands of the enemy by allowing himself to be angered by that childish letter. Not that he dashed out of his corner with a raging, do-or-die glare in his eye. What he felt was the cold, bitter anger of the patient man intent upon punishing his traducer—and every atom of anger in his soul was just so much weakening of his judgment; yes, and weakening of his fighting energies, as every physiologist knows.

Yet he made no outward showing of wrath as he sparred carefully through the rather tame first two rounds, a little in the lead, or in the third, in which Dempsey had a shade of advantage. Tunney let loose his anger in the fourth round with a flock of hard left jabs to the jaw and short, straight rights to the body that rocked the swarthy giant and had him tottering at the bell.

Readers of these pages may remember that Tunney's victory in the first battle came chiefly from a straight right to the jaw at the very beginning. This attack was based on long study of moving-picture films, which showed Dempsey's habit of turning his face around in profile just before he charged. Soon after the first gong he turned. Tunney shot his right for the moving chin—and hit a little too high, or there would have been a new champion there and then. As it was, the blow shook Dempsey from head to foot, slowed him down to half speed. Tunney repeated the blow several times thereafter, and it helped him to victory.

But he knew that Dempsey would have cured himself of that head-turning habit for this battle, and he figured that the best blow this time would be a straight right under the heart. This is a blow that weakens a man by shock, which depresses his heart action and shakes all his forces. It was a series of these blows that made Dempsey so groggy in the fourth round at Chicago. Thanks to his good condition, he rallied in the fifth round and was about even in the sixth.

Tunney came out for the seventh de-

termined to get even for the mean letter by knocking Dempsey cold. He admits it. In other words, Tunney, the careful, winning general, threw away the good strategy that had won at Philadelphia and was winning again, and became Tunney, the angry man, resenting a slur on his good name. He tried for the knock-out with left jabs to the jaw and rights under the heart. And when you step in close enough to use the right you are bound to leave yourself more open to counter blows.

Dempsey saw all this, and, boxing coolly, clipped Tunney's jaw with a left hook and a right jolt that staggered him. He banged again with both fists, and down plunged Champion Tunney, for the first time in his career, clutching the lower rope near Dempsey's corner to break his backward fall.

And now see how chickens come home to roost, or as ye sow so shall ye reap, or be sure your sin will find you out, as the old lessons have it. For years Dempsey has been in the habit of standing over his man after knocking him down, ready to flatten him again before he was quite sure on his feet after rising. He did this over and over again to Jess Willard when he took the championship from him at Toledo, and he did it to Georges Carpentier at Jersey City, and he did it to Firpo, the alleged "Wild Bull of the Pampas," four years ago in New York, and he knocked out each of these men by this clear violation of the rules.

Remembering these violations, the Illinois State Athletic Commission warned boxers and managers that the moment either boxer knocked the other down he must retire to a neutral corner farthest from the fallen man, and that *only after he got to that corner would the count of ten begin.* (Italics mine.) Dempsey's manager now says he never heard of this rule, though everybody else heard and understood it. Singularly unlucky man!

When Dempsey saw Tunney stretched on the floor at his feet, he stood half crouched over him as he had always stood over his victims. Quickly sensing that this was wrong, he stepped over Tunney's prostrate body and into his own corner—the nearest—where he stood right behind and over him with his arms stretched out on the ropes. He says now that he was resting and didn't mean any harm to Gene, but it is certain that if he had felt the old impulse to pounce on a shaken antagonist when he was not quite up on his feet, that position would have been best for the purpose, to say nothing of the added advantage of a surprise attack. Any one who doubts these facts can have his memory refreshed by looking at the moving pictures of the same.

The moment Tunney hit the floor the timekeeper began to count the ten. Referee Dave Barry, seeing where Dempsey stood, reminded him of the rule and ordered him to go to the neutral corner farthest from Tunney. Jack trotted away, and after he got to the farthest corner, Referee Barry began to count, and the timekeeper, who had chanted as far as four, broke off and began again with him. This made a total of at least thirteen seconds—some say more—from the time Tunney was knocked down until he arose at the count of nine.

Dempsey's manager claims that this constituted a knock-out, but everybody else, except Dempsey and his partisans, disagree with him. The Illinois State Athletic Commission declare that the officials simply enforced the rules agreed to by both sides and that Dempyes has only himself to blame for the extra time given to Tunney for recuperation. That seems as clear as sunlight. The commission has uttered this statement:

The rule, however, also provides that if the boxer on his feet fails to stay in the (neutral)

corner, the referee and timekeeper shall cease counting until he has so retired, after which the referee shall start his count.

This would settle the question before any court and jury, but fight partisans are no court and jury, and there are thousands of them this day who insist that Dempsey is the real champion of the world—which will be a great "boom" for the "gate" of the next battle.

Tunney says that he had two sensations when he found himself on the floor—regret for his own carelessness that sent him there, and a feeling of solid comfort in sitting there, out of all the hard work of hitting and being hit. Instantly his head cleared and he began to think. He nodded to Jimmy Bronson, his second, who was waving signals for him to stay down and take the full count. Benny Leonard, former lightweight champion and one of the shrewdest observers, says Tunney could have arisen almost instantly—and he was within a yard of him, eye to eye.

How did Tunney feel then? Here are his own words:

"You know that ever since I have been in the ring I've felt that sooner or later I must be knocked down; also I knew that I must get up and win my fight. I had worked out two plans for that: first, to get up and camouflage my real condition by sending over a hard right punch—with a prayer; or, second, to get up, dive right into a clinch and hang on hard, then drop at the next punch and take another count of nine if necessary.

"But these ideas disappeared as I knelt on my right knee, listening to the count. I knew I was all right. When I stood up I sidestepped Dempsey's rush and kept moving, just fast enough to keep out of his range, sparring with him. I had always noticed that he couldn't do much execution when he was chasing a man. He couldn't hit me. You remember he soon stood still and beckoned for me to come on in and slug with him. What a joke! The moment he did that I knew I had him. That gesture of asking—you might call it pleading—showed that he knew he was no master of the fight. And I knew that I was master of the situation. How thankful I am to my old teacher, who taught me always to make the pace—make the other man fight my way.

"They offered me smelling salts when I went to my corner at the end of the seventh, but I wouldn't have it; didn't need them. I was more careful in the last three rounds, but I knew I had him going. Indeed, the first punch I landed on him after getting off the floor was a right on the chin that shook him pretty hard and set him back. But he certainly has wonderful vitality and he kept trying hard, although in the last round I could feel him trembling when he clinched. He was all in. Still, he was better than he was at Philadelphia, and I'd have a lot of admiration for him if it were not for that dirty letter they sent out to the papers."

Tunney will not fight again until next summer—good for the gate receipts and very bad for Tunney. Dempsey will rest a while; but as no other business will yield him half as much money as boxing, he will soon be back in the ring. Jack Sharkey feels sure that he could do better next time, and Dempsey has promised to give him a chance. Friends of the rotund but tough Johnny Risko—what an unchancy name—offer Dempsey one hundred and fifty thousand dollars to meet him in Cleveland. He may do it. Tom Heeney still believes himself a championship possibility, and Dempsey might take him on. Phil Scott, a new English heavy, is here clamoring for a chance at all the contenders and then at the champion. He may have some-

thing to show, although England has not produced a great heavyweight in forty years.

When Tunney next defends his title he will probably meet one of the five challengers named above. To avoid disputes like those which have arisen out of the last two championship battles, the limit ought to be fixed at fifteen rounds at least. This would afford action enough for a clear-cut victory. Just now it seems to me that Dempsey will be the man—except for one thing: Commissioner William Muldoon refused to go to Chicago, saying that Tunney had already shown his superiority to Dempsey so clearly that he would not be interested to see him do it again; but that if Sharkey were the challenger he would surely be there.

Now, that is something to think carefully about, for Mr. Muldoon has a greater fund of experience and a longer head than any one else interested in the game. And he is wise. Long before any one else, he picked Tunney as the coming champion. That he still sees possibilities in Sharkey after his silly attempt to mix it with Dempsey is a strong indication that the Polish boy may be a dangerous contender. Certainly, with his youth, strength, speed and assurance, he is a menacing figure. All he lacked in the Dempsey battle was intelligence. Perhaps ring wisdom can be taught him, in which case his opponents had better be ready and careful.

Dempsey, if he goes on fighting as he now seems likely to do, ought to get better and better with each battle, so that by next year he may nearly approach the form and condition he showed in his first championship, at Toledo. And if he does this, neither Tunney nor any other man can afford to hold him cheaply. To say that because he will be thirty-three years old next year he will have slowed down and lost his fire is the cheapest kind of blah. A first-class fighting man can be good at forty if he lives right and keeps on fighting. He may not be quite so swift in action, but experience will make up for that. Jem Mace, Mike Donovan, Bob Fitzsimmons, and many another champion were topnotchers for many years after they had passed forty.

Tunney, during his year of waiting for the public appetite to grow keen, purposes to do some acting in the movies and a vaudeville tour. Well——

Stage life has wrecked many champions. The indoor work, late hours, tiresome travels, irregular meals and a score of other departures from the simple life of the gladiator did much to defeat Corbett, Fitzsimmons, Terry McGovern and other great champions. The movie life put Jack Dempsey out of his form, condition and title.

Oh, yes; Tunney has fine character and the mind of a middle-aged philosopher, and he can escape all the pitfalls—maybe. But if he abandons the open, rugged country, where he belongs, and takes up the soft living of the stage, he had better watch his step. Even his plan of hiring a good second-rater to "fight" him ten rounds in private just before he defends his title, won't help much. One round of a real fight has more battle practice than a dozen rounds with any hireling. Nothing can counteract the effect of soft living and idleness.

FAMOUS SIGNATURES

WHEN we read of Ferdinand and Isabella, Queen Elizabeth of England, Henry the Eighth, Marie Antoinette, and other historical characters of the far past, they hardly seem like flesh-and-blood human beings to us. We see their pictures in books, and read of their acts; but we come to accept them much in the same way that we accept people of mythology. Indeed, sometimes we hardly make any distinction between a person who lived and one who existed only in words. It is so with Cleopatra, who has become, by now, almost as mythical as Juno or Helen of Troy. It is so with Oliver Cromwell, Shakespeare, Washington, and Dante. They have become symbols.

It is startling, then, to see, as one may see in the Library of Congress in Washington, D. C., for instance, the handwriting and signatures of olden famous people. There one may read letters written by Mary, Queen of Scots; by Napoleon, and Josephine; by Richard the Third; by Ralph Waldo Emerson, by Charles the First of England; and many, many others. As you gaze at the old writing and the names, you are brought into personal contact with the people. You are astonished to find that these nebulous figures really lived—although you knew before that they did. Now, as you read their words, they are real.

President Grant, for example, wrote a letter from the Executive Mansion to some one, asking the latter to send the oysters and apples he had mentioned. "But send the oysters, by all means," wrote Grant. "The apples aren't as important."

What a pageant of celebrities! Kings and queens of all Europe, all the Presidents of the United States, writers, poets, and essayists without number. What can one do but marvel? After half an hour of studying all those old documents and letters and signatures, it becomes impossible to marvel any longer. The beholder gets so that he wanders from one glass case to another, taking time only to glance at the endless names. The biggest lesson in the experience is the truism that human nature does not change much, even over a thousand-year period. Ages ago they were worrying about the weather and food and bills, too.

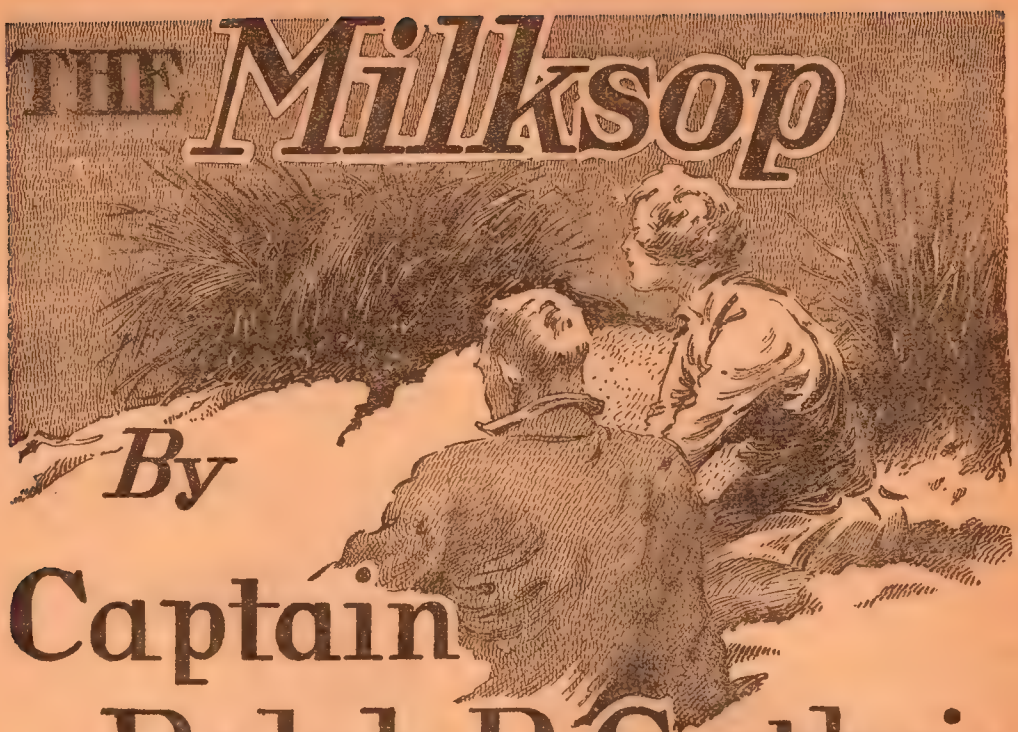
One group that strikes the beholder forcibly in that great collection of original letters is the exchange of notes between Generals Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee, at the close of the Civil War. These letters—mere notations—are shown in a glass case, and one may see the evolution of the surrender and the arrangement of the terms, written in scrawling handwriting on old paper.

General Grant's notes are on yellow papers which look like slabs of cardboard from a shoe box, and his energetic, slashing handwriting swerved obliquely down across the sheets. He proposes his terms briefly.

General Lee replies on small sheets of school paper—that rough, gray stuff we used to write on in our grades—and his sentences follow the lines correctly. The only concession to official dignity is a small impression on Lee's sheets, "Headquarters," or something like that.

But the amazing thing about it all is that the fate of an entire nation hung on those hasty notes, that one of the greatest events in all history was conducted in so simple a manner. Here was no fanfare of trumpets, here were no gay banners of victory, nor royal carpets nor gleaming weapons nor burning incense—only the simple penciled words of two courteous, generous, brave, great Americans. Those meager notes are more inspiring than the seals of kings' signet rings.

THE Milksop



By

Captain Ralph R. Guthrie

In Six Parts Part VI

Author of "The Boy from Tekulik," "The High Price of Bangles," Etc.

Hollis learns the dramatic history of the Fullhardt gold, and of Mr. Dean. Then he has a little talk with Dorothy on the top of a hill in the moonlight.

CHAPTER XXVII.

I OPEN THE AMULET.

AS I approach the dénouement of my story, I wish that I might tell it differently. The ending, I find, is even more difficult than was the beginning, when one's imagination is tethered to the simple face that thus and so happened.

A novelist, who weaves out-and-out falsehoods fabricated from errant fancies, would extend the sequestration of myself and this golden frontier girl to days, weeks, or even months, and lose nothing in the telling. He would throw in an Indian battle or two with us fighting for our lives—the girl loading the rifles while I blazed away through portholes in the walls of the soddy. He might bring Red Monswick back into the tale—and Tony and Tillie and Demerritt. Alas, I can't do that. If ever I had a brilliant imagination, I have blunted it in the money market. I must deal with facts, and tell the story as it really happened.

But the facts of youth are romantic enough.

Take that night I spent with the horses! I never have slept less, nor dreamed better. Nevertheless, it seemed

the hours of darkness would drag on eternally. The blizzard must have died out suddenly during the night. The morning broke fair and calm. It seeems I slept at last, to be jostled out of my unconsciousness by the invading odor of bacon and coffee. In a jiffy I was dressed and beyond the partition.

"Hello there, sleepy-bug!" chimed Dorothy radiantly.

"Hello, cook!" I retorted, and both of us laughed as though we had achieved the height of early-morning wit and repartee.

Dorothy and I sat down to the breakfast she had prepared. Afterward we went outside to revel in the sunshine on the snow. The temperature was rising rapidly; the thatch of the roof was wet and dripping already. The day bid fair to be pleasant and beautiful.

For a while we stood silent, admiring. Then she spoke.

"Hollis, I guess I had better get out of here, now that the storm is over."

"Yes," I replied gloomily. "I am sorry it didn't keep right on forever!"

"Why, Hollis?"

"Because you must leave me here alone, Dorothy!"

"But I am an extra mouth to feed, you know."

"Hush!" I implored.

"But we can't live on—on——"

"Kisses?"

"I was going to say that, but you looked too modest."

"I thought of it, too. It doesn't sound so bad." I was looking at her mouth. "Must you go to-day?'

"Yes."

"Not this morning?"—panicky.

"I'm afraid I should. Daddy Dean, Murky, Dan, Tony—and no one knows how many, will have started out hours ago, looking for me. The first place they would look would be home. No one would think of looking here, except Big Antlers."

"I hope he stays away," I said. "I wish you wouldn't go."

"But you know I'm an engaged woman."

"I should say I do know it! But what are you going to do about the lieutenant? Are you really going to marry him?" My heart was in my mouth.

"Oh, him?" she responded drearily. "He is already married. Didn't I tell you that before? He's wedded to his career."

What infinite sarcasm she could put in her tone! I remember the glances she exchanged with the parson's wife down in Plum Creek.

"Oh!" I said.

"Yes!"

"Huh!"

"Well," declared Dorothy with resignation, "I must get old Rattler out of his stall and ride again." But she made no move to do so; and I was not in the least impatient.

"How about looking around a little for the gold?" I inquired hopefully.

"Let's!" she cried.

"Do you suppose the walls are hollow and it is hidden in there?" I asked.

"Not a chance. Red Monswick probed every inch with a hay fork. If it had been there, he would have found it."

He may have buried it in the ground."

"If he did, it's gone. Everybody, including myself and my friend Big Antlers, has surveyed the entire landscape, but there was never a marker that the eye could detect."

"The trees?"

"Red and others have tested the ground all around them, and there has been a lot of digging. It isn't there."

"Then, I'm at the end of my rope," I shouted triumphantly, the prey to a grand idea. "I'll give up my treasure hunt right now for want of competent

clews, and go with you. We'll both ride."

"How about Mammy Rose's amulet?"

"I never thought of that. Suppose we get a little hay out here and sit and ponder before we open it."

"All right," she agreed. "But let's hurry for I really ought to be making a start now."

We brought out a few armfuls of dried grass from the shanty and spread it on a snowdrift. Then we sat down, and I took the amulet in my hand and studied it soberly. The melting snow continued to drip from the thatch.

"Well!" gurgled Dorothy, "open it and laugh." Then, wistfully, "I can't imagine why father ever did such a thing. It is too ridiculous."

I untied the thong and opened the little sack gingerly.

I didn't laugh. For a long time I sat silent gazing down on the little heap of gray powder in my hand. Something was being whispered into my ear—some memory, or forgotten thought. It seemed to me that this indeed was a code and a subtle one, meant only for the right person to decipher. Slowly I drew the puckering string. We were both puzzled.

"Dorothy," I declared thoughtfully, "the key is here if we could read it. Your father was not insane when he developed this idea. I'm going to stay here until I find out. I wish you would stay with me."

"I can't," she replied. "But I'll be back to-morrow, if you insist on staying. Why not come with me, and when the snow is all melted, we will return together?"

My resolution disappeared instantly. Not a very resolute young man, I'm afraid. Besides, I was *tempted* to keep this girl at my side as long as possible. There was my compact with Uncle Pemb to consider. Pretty nice chap, after all, Uncle Pemb!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A GLAD REUNION.

WHEN we debouched—after an all too short journey, every moment of which was golden to me—from the sand hills, and the broad reaches of the Wild Horse Flats burst upon our vision, we felt like pilgrims returning home after many years. There were troops around the Dean home, so much like a fortification, anyway, and there was smoke issuing from the chimney. Dean evidently had elected to return to his homestead, Indians or no Indians.

As our bronchos galloped down the incline to the yard, we saw a considerable group gathered there, and guessed what business had brought them together. Dean was organizing a party to search the hills for Dorothy. At our appearance, Murky and Dan, hovering around the outskirts of the gathering, emitted a glad whoop and rushed to meet us in a mad, jumping, barking circle of dogs. Dan waved his hat and sent his voice booming across the prairie; the soldiers cheered. I saw a woman with a baby in her arms—Tillie; and then Tony cavorting like a springy-legged marionette beside her. My eyes searched hurriedly for the stalwart form of Big Antlers; he was absent.

Thus, triumphant and happy, we joined them. Dean embraced Dorothy affectionately and at length; then threw a muscular arm about my shoulders and gave me a mighty, bone-cracking hug.

"Good, my boy!" he commended heartily. "We hoped you and Dot had hooked up some way. It seemed natural. Where did you find her?"

"She came to me in the storm," I answered, a trifle proudly, I am afraid. I wanted to add that I hoped she never would leave me again; but Tillie was looking at us with swimming eyes. When she saw my attention directed her way, she raised the baby and cried:

"Look at little Tony, Mister Pembleton. Ain't he cute? What d'ye think of him?"

"I think he is almost as sweet as his mamma, and that he is going to be almost as much of a whale in a fight as his dad," was my heartfelt response. Then we began to babble, everybody talking at once.

Dorothy had fled again to her foster-father's arms. Suddenly her eyes became fixed in startled amazement over his shoulder, looking toward the barn. I turned to see what had attracted her attention, and saw, with a start and a recession of all the blood from my heart, a spare, soldierly figure unlatching the corral gate and advancing slowly toward where we were standing. It was Lieutenant Withers, whom I thought gone East on leave.

The young officer swung up the gravel walk with his old assurance of manner, his clean, polished saber-scabbard slapping against his thigh. Dorothy, I was pleased to note, did not run to meet him. She did, however, smile sweetly enough; and Withers, snapping his heels together gallantly, planted a light kiss on her cheek, which I resented hotly. After this pleasant formality he drew the girl aside with a polite, though condescending, nod in my direction; and, still holding her hands, began to explain how he had happened to take leave, and what had happened to make him cancel his orders and return posthaste to Fort Kearney.

I learned afterward he had left in a huff, but realized in time the false position his departure was sure to put him in, with regard to Dorothy.

That evening at supper, the pair seemed to be getting along on about the old footing; although Dorothy did seem, at times, nervous and ill at ease. While we sat smoking our pipes over the dishes, I suddenly thought of Big Antlers.

"What has become of my friend, the Indian?" I asked Mr. Dean.

"Big Antlers?" replied the ranchman. "Oh, he hasn't been seen since the night Wihake rode. That's not all, either. Red Monswick and two fellow scoundrels are reported missing at Allen Brothers'. Darky Jim was with them, but returned, convinced that Wihake was a real 'hant.' He admitted quitting the chase early to avoid complications, but declared he distinctly saw the Indian girl break into two parts and ride in opposite directions. That settled the matter so far as he was concerned. About twenty minutes later, he said, we heard heavy firing as if twenty rifles were popping all at the same time. So he hastened back."

"I hope Big Antlers wasn't implicated in that heavy firing," I remarked, looking across the table at Dorothy with a twinkle in my eye. Lieutenant Withers did not see the flutter of an eyelash, with which she demurely signaled the answer that I might have conjectured correctly.

"I think," said Withers, "that Red Monswick, as you call him, a bit overreached himself, in chasing the Indian maiden. If he has come to grief, I have reason to believe the commandant will advise the big cattlemen that it is to be a closed incident. Demerritt, in some mysterious manner, has been fostering the belief of the Indians in their spirit rider for many years, with the consent of the military authorities, as a safeguard of peace."

"Perhaps there *is* a ghost-girl rider," I ventured, looking him in the eye.

"Bosh!" snorted the lieutenant. "There is not a single thing to support such a legend."

And again I looked across at Dorothy and received a gentle flutter of her eyelash—this time in warning not to carry the conversation further. So I concluded that her lover had not been

taken as far into her confidence as had I, and I was correspondingly delighted.

"I think we had better all ride over to the Fullhardt cabin to-morrow or next day," said Mr. Dean. "I haven't been there in years, with certain potent reasons to keep me away. Now that we have some further assurance of peace, I hope I can venture to do so without running the risk of an ambuscade. I have a notion Big Antlers, if he is alive, will be there ahead of us."

So it was arranged we all would go the following day.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TWO WONDERFUL DISCOVERIES.

WE were a glum party that set forth at sunrise, in two buckboards, or astride our ponies, according to our personal preferment. Dorothy, Mr. Dean and Lieutenant Withers rode in one of the wagons. A half dozen cavalrymen jolted along behind them, and tagging along in the rear, were Murky, Dan, Tony and myself. None of us was very talkative. Withers seemed somewhat down in the mouth, Dorothy thoughtful, Dean introspective and sober. Tillie and Mrs. Green chattered in subdued tones.

As for me, my heart was as dead and as cold as so much lead in my chest. Somehow all of us seemed to realize that we were approaching a crisis, the outcome of which was destined to revamp our lives. The feeling seemed prevalent, like a premonition that we were about to find the Fullhardt gold, but the why of this was inexplicable to me at first.

Tony, who like the others had been very quiet, and who stuck by my side like a leech, broke the silence once.

"Mr. Pemberton," he declared with the emphasis of finality, "Big Antlers will be at the shanty when we get there."

"What makes you think so?" I demanded curiously.

He dropped his voice to a sort of awesome whisper.

"He and Dorothy looked inside the little buckskin bag that she had one of the boys swipe from you. I saw 'em do it. He'll be waiting for us, and he'll tell us where it's hidden. He has a tame cricket up there that tells him everything he wants to know. You watch!"

"Huh!" I grunted. It didn't matter to me whether I ever saw the mysterious treasure, or not. It was not what I was about to find that concerned me; it was what I was about to lose. For I had distinctly seen Dorothy drop an affectionate hand on the lieutenant's arm. My heart sank as I saw it.

Big Antlers was waiting for us when we arrived, holding his right arm aloft and uttering the one word of Indian greeting:

"How!"

Dorothy leaped down off the seat, and was in his arms in a moment, the lieutenant looking at the spectacle with a bit of disgust. The medicine-man's rifle was lying on the ground at his feet; and on the stock were four freshly cut notches, which told their own story. Big Antlers, not having fired the fatal shots, was only the indirect cause of the death of four men, so was not allowed their scalps. In order to proclaim that nevertheless he was responsible for their ends, he had taken the white man's method of announcing the kill.

"Now we all here," said Big Antlers. "I show you how my Brother Fullhardt make big medicine charm from little sack of ashes."

He held out his hand to me, and without remonstrance, I dropped therein the buckskin bag. He took it without another word, turned on his heel and walked slowly to the pile of ashes the dead Fullhardt had made during his

long years of solitude. Standing astride of the flattened mound, he opened the sack and strewed the contents on the gray mound, from which it might have been taken originally.

"Ashes!" he announced. "Why Fullhardt he make so much ash? Huh! He make ash, because ash him always jus' ash. Year—two year—ten year—fifteen year go by, ash him jus' ash. Dig!"

Spades are part of the equipment of every frontier buckboard. Two of them were forthcoming, and a couple of soldiers bent their backs to the task of digging up the old ash pile. It was deeper than surface indications indicated. The spades went clinking through the brown-black column of it, foot by foot. It appeared that a hole fully six feet deep had been first dug and then filled with ashes until it was filled to the top—a column of unchangeable material, resting on top of—what?

Whatever it was, there was an eternal finger of ashes pointing to its secret seclusion, readable only to those possessing the sense to interpret properly the contents of the buckskin bag.

By and by the spades struck something hard; and Big Antlers unceremoniously ordered all work suspended. Very tenderly, for one of his race, he assisted Dorothy into the hole. There, in a few minutes, she uncovered a small, heavy box, which was received by Big Antlers and laid on the ground in the center of a circle of gaping mouths. Dorothy, her face strangely flushed and tears glistening in her eyes, clambered out. The box was opened—there had been no necessity of locking it—and we gazed upon a packet of papers and a vast bundle of fifty-dollar U. S. Treasury certificates.

As if bewitched by the sight of so much money all in one pile, we watched stupidly while the girl bent, detached a slip of writing paper, now yellow from its long confinement underground, glanced at it, and thrust it into the bosom of her dress.

"There," she said turning to me with a heart-gripping throb in her tone. "Hollis, I have beaten you. It was not through your agency, but because of Big Antlers and myself, that the treasure is found. I deliver it now into your hands. It is as my father wished. God with me, I have been able to return it to the person from whom he took it in a moment of madness.

"And Daddy Dean!" she cried, turning to the ranchman with eyes fairly flaming with excitement. "You can hold up your head again among men of your own honorable clan. You have been more than a father to me, kind and forgiving always; but you have always longed for the son a malevolent fate robbed you of. He is yours again, Daddy Dean. Take him into your arms. I have reason to believe that in spite of a bad beginning, he is a Pembleton worthy of his breed."

I was too stunned to speak.

Dean turned toward me, as I stood rooted to the spot.

"Son——" he said. "Hollis, I am your father."

"Yes, dad!" I answered, my tongue finding itself, and advanced into his outstretched arms. And—or glorious juxtaposition!—Dorothy, weeping, was included in that embrace.

I was thrilled and amazed by the discovery, under those dramatic circumstances, of my father, whose very personality had been only a legend as far as I was concerned—a legend to be sketched briefly, with downcast eyes. I had been told he was dead; yet here was I, in his muscular, still-youthful arms. What was that Dorothy had said about the treasure being mine? Bah! What did I care for money! I would give it all away. So we stood, and I thought

for a long time, an excited wall of gaping countenances hemming us in.

But we couldn't hold that pose forever. At length, my father, Colonel Judd Pembleton, gently pushed us away from him for a lingering look, and then released us altogether.

"Come, my children," he said. "We will gather up this fortune recaptured from the ash pit and go home. I want to tell Hollis a few things about myself —just to get acquainted."

Every one thereupon rushed forward with congratulations. In the forefront were the lieutenant, Murky and Dan. I thought the expression on Withers' face belied his warm words, but the enthusiasm of the ex-yeggman was beyond dispute.

"Jiminy fishhooks!" exclaimed Dan, "after all this joiney and us bein' expoits too, we lose de swag to a tenderfoot."

"Yes," I acknowledged, "and I don't yet know how it happened."

"I'll tell youse," put in Murky, "de goil did it. Youse had a live wire on de inside woikin' fer youse."

I was hoping the lieutenant overheard this, but he was busy with his men and horses, preparing to mount, for he had the grace to recognize my priority now in claiming the right to ride in the buckboard.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE STRANGE HISTORY OF THE GOLD.

"DOROTHY," explained my father, as we jogged homeward, "has been my guardian angel ever since Big Antlers brought her to my arms many years ago. I felt her influence over my life from that moment, small as she was.

"When Dorothy came to me, I was about on my last crust of bread," he went on reminiscently. "My venture had been without funds and seemed foredoomed to failure. However, the little girl had a thousand dollars in good fifty-dollar bills sewed inside her garments, with a note saying the money was intended to remunerate some good person for bringing her up, in case an accident happened to her father. I used it to buy farm implements and a small herd of cattle, but kept the property in her name. It is in her name, or rather in trust for her, to this day."

"It is all yours, just the same," put in Dorothy. "You know, daddy, I'll never consent to take it, nor a penny from its sale!"

"Hush!" said my father. He went on:

"When your mother died, Hollis, and for two years afterward, I was president of the Cotton Exchange National Bank of Cotton Mills. I was proud as any Pembleton before me, and as dashing in my financial field as a banker very well could be and retain the confidence of his clientele. Mr. Fullhardt was vice-president, a very lovable and apparently conservative young man—with a taste for society, nevertheless. He was a man of considerable wealth. I remember him as emotionally inclined only on matters pertaining to personal honor and his young wife, the mother of Dorothy here. The dereliction which he afterward admitted was his was so entirely unlike him that I am convinced he could not have been mentally right at the time.

"We had, in the bank, a cashier named Peter Harmon. You have known him out here as Red Monswick. He was an expert on money matters, and his efficiency concealed some large faults. He was, in fact, an unscrupulous scoundrel. So clever was this man, that we never guessed him to be anything but a loyal and conscientious servant of the bank, even though one day he advised us into speculation which so involved us that we had to throw into the market every resource in our personal possession—Fullhardt and I—and we

lost it all. Nothing was left but the assets of the bank as a corporation.

"Of course, what we lost privately we kept to ourselves as long as we could. However, three men had to know about it, and they were the cashier, Fullhardt and myself. As I have already stated, even in our disaster, we had no thought of suspecting Harmon of complicity. We thought it only a case of poor judgment on his part.

"But we learned later that it wasn't a case of poor judgment, but a criminal maneuver to ruin us. The man Harmon was a fiend. We had in the safe your inheritance, consisting of the money and securities you have just seen. They comprise the bequest of your grandfather, in a will that did not allow me, as executor, to invest any part of it. Harmon had plotted to steal this bequest for years, his problem not being so much how to get the money, as how to get away with it.

"The long-hoped-for opportunity was furnished by our financial misadventure. He knew that Mr. Fullhardt's wife was very ill, and that she was very aristocratic, too. He knew her husband would almost sell his soul to keep the fine mansion they owned from being sold to pay his debts. He went to Fullhardt and tempted him. He said he could get the money, if Fullhardt would give him the combination to the safe, and that its loss never would be noted before you, Hollis, had grown to manhood. He would divide with Fullhardt. Later, when things turned for the better, they could easily replace the money and securities.

"Those were the plans he divulged to a man who thought the otherwise inevitable loss of his home would kill his sick wife. Fullhardt fell, only to find out that they were not the plans Harmon meant to follow, at all. The money was taken out and divided—a hundred and twenty-five thousand apiece—and then the master conniver sprang a trap.

"That night, after every cent had been withdrawn, Harmon, according to a prearranged plan, got a couple of yeggs—your old friends Murky and Dan—to break open the safe, so as to throw the blame on some one else. When Murky and Dan had completed the job, they repaired to the appointed rendezvous with the large parcel of canceled notes, which they supposed to be the legacy, but which were merely decoys. And they found the police there, waiting to arrest them.

Of course, neither of the yeggs thought for an instant they had been duped by Harmon, who promptly visited them in jail to explain things. Harmon declared that I had told him to make the arrangements for the fake robbery, and advised them to accuse me in a confession to the police and swear I had approached them direct, instead of through himself as agent. He said that would leave him free to go to the governor for a pardon. Harmon was a born leader and he persuaded them to do exactly as he advised. The next day I was branded as a poltroon throughout the nation—as the proud scion of an old Kentucky family who had stooped to rob his own infant son. Even my brother, who was just then rising in the financial world, at first cut me cold, when I went to him for sympathy and assistance.

"The night the newspapers were full of the confessions of Murky and Dan, Mr. Fullhardt realized the depth of degradation to which he had been led. Not having the courage to face me with his dereliction, he turned his half of the loot over to Harmon and tried to wash his hands of the accursed business. He found that to be impossible. As if in retribution, his beloved wife died within the week. There was no reason to be proud any longer, so, heartbroken

and with his mind obviously impaired, he came to me and told me what had happened. Soon afterward he lost his mental balance, and we had to send him to a sanitarium. My one hope of clearing my name was thus taken away from me.

"But Mr. Fullhardt in a few months was dismissed from the institution partly cured, to find that Harmon had drifted out of the country. Meanwhile, Murky and Dan had been sentenced to fifteen years in the penitentiary. My own trial never came up, because of Pemb's influence brought to bear upon learning Fullhardt's version.

"Fullhardt, enraged because nobody would listen to his story as one coming from a sane man, at last set out to run Harmon down and take the money away by force and return it to the bank. After he located the man, in Monswick, I followed to assist as much as I could. It was the only thing to do to clear my name.

"Your mother having died at your birth, I had to turn you over to your aunts to raise, knowing your uncle would keep an eye on your fortunes.

"Fullhardt lived alone with his little daughter, and waited for a chance to pounce on his old enemy. At last he went to him and demanded he redivide the spoil, or Fullhardt would turn some time; then Monswick went with Fullhardt at night to a secret cache in a sand blow-out not far from Allen Brothers' ranch. When Fullhardt saw that the treasure was intact, he turned on Monswick like a maniac, struck him down with a club and took the treasure box and all it contained.

"From then on, Red Monswick or some of his gang watched the Fullhardt place night and day, so we dared not remove the box that contained the gold. A few weeks later Fullhardt was murdered. Big Antlers found the child, Dorothy, who had been cruelly left to die by the murderers of her father, and brought her to me. I found pinned inside her dress with some money, a note to me, and the little 'amulet' which the writer declared contained a hint as to the whereabouts of the gold. He had made it so subtle that Monswick, if he had happened to find it, never could have deciphered it. I assure you that I could make nothing out of it, so I followed Fullhardt's suggestion and sent it back home for Mammy Rose to hold in trust until you became old enough to try your hand.

"Dorothy, who had set her heart, and risked her life, to retrieve her father's lost honor, was impatient with me for having done this, feeling, no doubt, that it would rob her dead father of the credit for righting the wrong through his daughter. You see her father had made me promise to tell her everything.

"That," said Mr. Dean, "is practically everything that is to be said of the Fullhardt gold. I might add, however, that putting the amulet in an old army canteen was my idea. It was one of Mammy Rose's psychic impulses that suggested the stipulation that the amulet was not to be opened until all other means of finding the treasure had been exhausted."

"And that is all, father?" I asked, and marveled that this great bronze frontiersman at my side could be the cultured Colonel Judd Pembleton, fugitive glimpses of whom I had caught from time to time from my aunts' conversations. "How environment can remodel the human clay!" I thought.

"That is all that I recall now," he replied, and patted the back of my hands, adding the word "son."

"Tell him about Murky and Dan—the story they told you," urged Dorothy, who had remained quiescent with downcast eyes while her worshipped "Daddy Dean" recounted her father's adventures.

"Those two rascals!" chuckled my father. "Well, they went to the penitentiary, and there learned about Harmon's treachery. Naturally, they felt that the money belonged to them—it is the creed of their world. I wouldn't trust them out of sight with it, even now.

"Well, they plotted and planned vengefully. Finally they were let out on good behavior, and hastened back to Cotton Mills to see what they could see. Some old cronies there were now reformed and acting as police stool pigeons. One of them was pretty close to the chief, and knew Dorothy had been making inquiries about Mammy Rose, and also the chief had interviewed Mammy Rose about what they thought amounted to a chart showing the location of the gold. The girl had wired that she intended to make certain train connections, and the chief wired back that it was his understanding from Mammy Rose that some mysterious person would start West immediately with information about the treasure."

"And that was how our trails run together," I declared!

"Yes. That was how it happened, though quite accidentally. It was only from the name on your luggage that the two vagabonds learned your identity. They searched your baggage the night Dorothy joined the trail, but overlooked the canteen. People embarking on delicate missions should not put their names on everything they possess. By the same means they learned who Dorothy was. After their futile search, they remembered that she and her traveling companion, Miss Denby, sister of the man who was killed down on the South Loup last year, had come through the same coach where you slept. They waylaid Miss Denby in the vestibule and tried to wheedle her, then threatened. Finally Murky grabbed her hand bag, while Dan pushed her off the train."

"You never told me that part of it, Daddy Dean," said Dorothy gravely.

"Well," said my father, laughing teasingly, "you and those two boys seemed to be the best of pals, and I didn't have the heart. However, they have both reformed, due to your affectionate interest, and are going to settle down in the Flats for the rest of their lives."

"What bothers me," I declared, "is that neither Uncle Pemb nor either of my aunts told me anything of this, when they sent me out on this experience junket."

"Very naturally they wouldn't," I was told. "Remember that I was supposed by all and sundry to be dead in Mexico. It was not known to them that I wanted to reappear, after all these years had elapsed. Nevertheless, they must have had a longing for the bad blot on the family escutcheon to be cleared up; and my brother, who is a sort of philosopher, probably thought it wisest to let nature take its course. Besides, he wanted to buck you up—and did a mighty good job of it."

And at this point of the story, the bronchos turned the buckboard into the front yard of my father's home; and Lieutenant Withers, his face preternaturally grave, assisted Dorothy to alight, while my heart, which had been beating with great ecstasy all the afternoon, became once more as heavy as so much dead metal in my chest.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A MESSAGE FROM COTTON MILLS.

TWO hundred and fifty thousand dollars! That and a tortured heart—I had come in the twilight upon Dorothy sobbing on the shoulder of Lieutenant Withers—were the things I had gained by coming West. When I checked one against the other, I found fortune still in debt to me—a debt I

feared never could be squared on the books. Dorothy was gone from me, and my lip curled when I thought of the irony which had attended my sudden ascendancy to wealth unearned. She herself was too proud to accept any of the money, although it was her own fair hands which had dug it up and placed it at my feet. I fervently wished that I had the strength to hurl it all at her feet and myself into oblivion.

The title, in truth, was mine. That couldn't be denied. With so much wealth at my disposal I could be a financial giant in a small town like Cotton Mills. But what had my aunts taught me to believe, wise old ladies that they were: "It is a fine thing," they had said, "to have the strength of a giant, but a poor thing to use it like a giant."

I longed to do something heroic before this girl who had given her hand to some one else. I wanted to crush her with the conviction of my transcendental worthiness; to so impress her that in after years she would look back upon my sacrifices with a pang of remorse and regret, because she had accepted a mere uniform, when she might have had a heart of gold.

She had misjudged me. Yes; I would show her, and the demonstration should take place before the fearful glamour of wealth had taken too great a hold on my life. It would be to-night.

So that night I had them all assemble in the sitting room and made a nice talk. I told them that the money did not mean anything to me. It had come easy, and it could go easy, as well. I desired to start my financial career with an act typical of the Kentucky Pembletons, and yet only an act of common justice. It sounded to me like a very chivalrous talk, but when I wound it up by announcing that, personally, I did not give a rap for this money piled up before me and intended to divide it among those present, the announcement apparently left my audience cold. My father shifted in his chair with an air of disappointment, as if I had committed some sort of social error. Dorothy looked down at her hands and smiled understandingly, without enthusiasm. Lieutenant Withers seemed to be sneering behind his hand. Tony and Tillie grinned. However, Murky and Dan allowed their eyes to light up for a moment with the hitherto suppressed fires of cupidity; but then they went on puffing at their short-stemmed pipes. It was Big Antlers who arose majestically as spokesman for the gathering.

All listened attentively as he spoke.

"My friend and brother Blue Lodge has spoken wisely," he declared. "He no like money in big piles. It no good to him. What good, he say, big money? No want. Big Antlers want one thing all his life—one silver-mounted rifle. That is all."

He sat down.

"Dorothy," I begged, "let me share this fortune with you."

"You know very well," replied Dorothy, "that I couldn't take a cent of it in any form whatever. All you have to do is to remember that my life has been devoted to handing it over to you intact—in payment of a family debt."

"Father?"

"My son, I am in about the same position as Dorothy. Besides, I wish only to spend the rest of my life here on my farm and ranch. Money means nothing to me out here. I only want the opportunity to struggle on as I have been struggling for fifteen years."

"Murky and Dan?"

Dan cleared his throat and arose.

"Speakin' fer bot'," he announced, "we don't want nothin'. Murky and muh have settled on stayin' here and makin' our own."

"Tony and Tillie?" They shook their heads.

With the exception of Big Antlers'

humble request, my attempt at philanthropy was a flare-back.

"I don't want it either," I snarled at them. "Why don't somebody help me get rid of it?"

My father took the floor.

"Son," he boomed in his big voice, "you need your father's guidance. This is the West. I don't see anybody here who particularly craves money. All anybody wants, is to win with his own hands what he is out here to win. The money you offer is your bequest. No one but you has a shadow of a claim to any of it.

"However, if you want to get rid of part of it, I suggest that you loan Dan and Murky ten thousand each to start their farms, and Tony and Tillie the same amount to improve theirs. That is all you can do at this particular time."

"I'll do as you suggest, father," I conceded, my face red with humiliation, and sat down.

In a day or two, during the entire time of which I felt like one disgraced in the eyes of my fellow men, I was planless, except that I had no intention of returning to my native soil so long as Dorothy dwelt unmarried in the vicinity of the Wild Horse Flats. Then I suddenly remembered that my Uncle Pemb and my aunts had a right to know the outcome of my venture, and went to my father with the request that he inform them by wire.

"That is a very good idea," he replied, "but it is a trifle late. I informed them by wire two days ago. If you had kept an accurate count of the soldiers, you would have noticed that two of them have disappeared. We are expecting them to arrive back from Fort Kearney in a day or so with a reply from my brother, together with Lieutenant Withers' orders to return to the army post."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, my mind dwelling with particular emphasis on the lieutenant's departure.

The telegraphic reply came in due time. This is what it said:

Prue, Fidelia, myself, overjoyed our brother's vindication and Hollis' success. He may return when ready, as I have lately married and am retiring from business in favor of him. For your information the bank title has always been held in your name and you must now return as president. Assets three million. PEMBLETON.

Just like my Uncle Pemb.

Father looked like he had lost his best friend for a day or two, and then brightened up. He was preëminently a banker at heart.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DOROTHY AND I.

THE time had at last arrived for Lieutenant Withers to return, and I saw Dorothy and him ride away into the sand hills to have their final canter together. The girl's future, I felt, was no longer in doubt. She might go East with the rest of us for a short while, but ultimately she would return to Fort Kearney to become the bride of the army officer.

They had been gone several hours, when we saw them at last galloping down the trail toward the house, a third person astride Withers' charger, behind the saddle. The extra rider, it developed, was no other than my old friend, Demerritt, the trapper, whom they had picked up on the road.

"Hello, my boy!" the latter called, when he saw me hastening out to greet him. "I onderstand ye've run afoul of a passell of luck. Happy days!"

"Thanks," I returned. "I want to congratulate you, too, on being alive. We were afraid the Indians had got you."

"Me? Hell! No Injun ever's goin' ter git me. I'm too tough. Besides, Big Antlers is my friend, and he's the biggest medicine man in the Pawnee nation now. Takes full credit fer findin' the

Fullhardt money, and says the proof of it will be a silver-mounted weepin' which ye have bought fer him."

Withers was strolling toward the house with Dorothy, having turned their mounts over to a couple of soldiers. We were watching them, I ruefully, Demerritt with amused interest, because there was the full width of the gravel walk between the lovers.

"Them two's a fine pair," he commented. "But it's too bad she had ter throw him down. I know she did, fer they have had mighty little to say to each other all the way in."

"Just a lovers' quarrel," I informed him, hoping nevertheless it was something else.

"Huh!" he commented. "Thar's a lot of things ye ain't learned yet."

Meanwhile I wondered if the West was still so wild that a man could get away with assassinating an army officer.

We were all filled with gloom in the days that followed, because we were packing up our effects to leave this glorious frontier land. Tony, Tillie and Mrs. Denby were to take over the ranch known as the "Dean place," and Mrs. Denby was selling out her old cabin and its three hundred and sixty acres of land, so she could take possession without delay. Murky and Dan were preëmpted homesteads farther up the valley; and, with the money I had loaned, there was enough capital behind the various farming activities thus inaugurated to insure the permanency of the settlement in spite of the cattle barons.

In fact, in the next twenty years, these gentry were a thing of the past, on account of the tremendous influx of settlers which broke up their mighty pastures of government land, and instituted the reign of King Alfalfa. And that official's first act was to banish its loyal servant, Big Antlers, to a reservation in South Dakota.

Dorothy and I had had very little to say to each other, but I thought I saw her looking at me anxiously once or twice at the supper table. Then came May.

May was a brilliant month, as it always is in western Nebraska. The sand hills were covered with daisy and sweet-pea blossoms, and dandelions. A breeze, laden with their sweet fragrance, perpetually wafted the no-less-perfumed something we call "romance"—revitalizing bodies of man and beast with the blessed spirit of spring.

I remember the moon at full was brighter than I had ever seen it; and when I remarked that fact to Dorothy, sitting in the midst of a pensive aura across the supper board, she brightened up and threw me a challenging look.

"Let's go out and look at it—somewhere," she exclaimed suddenly. "It is our last Nebraska moon, Hollis. We won't see moons like this in Kentucky."

So I arose stiffly and offered her my arm, turning in time to catch a wink exchanged between Murky and Dan.

Nothing ever passed that pair.

We wandered far from the Dean place before we spoke—up the road, turning to the left, mounting the first rim of the sand hills, farther still to a high peak, the top of which commanded the entire length and breadth of Wild Horse Flats. There we paused and allowed our minds to become enthralled by the scene. The valley swam in a shimmering sea, its several small lakes glistening like steel mirrors, set in black cedar frames.

My pulse began to quicken at the sight.

"I'd like to stay here all the rest of my life," I declared impulsively.

"Would you, Hollis?" softly breathed the girl at my side.

My soul rose on wings, inspired, no doubt, by the tones of that beauteous voice, playing havoc with my senses.

"If," I amended, "you could be here to make it bearable, Dorothy!"

"You are a foolish boy, Hollis," continued those tones teasingly. "However, I have heard practically the same thing before."

"But I *mean* it," I insisted warmly. "Dorothy, I am sick because I am about to see you go out of my life."

"You are? I thought I was going to Kentucky with you and Daddy Dean."

"You know," I retorted bitterly, "what I mean. Soon enough you will leave me again to marry the lieutenant."

"That is all settled then—that I am to marry the lieutenant. Is that what you want me to do?"

"You know it's not."

"But you spoke as though it was an assured fact, or as if you had firmly settled on it," she chided.

"And then," I snapped viciously, "you will be a person who will travel from army post to army post, gradually accumulating a family, while I grow old and sour like my Uncle Pemb—alone."

"But your Uncle Pemb finally has decided to take on a family," she reminded me sweetly. "Perhaps he will make up now for all he has lost in the way of connubial bliss. You can expect to do likewise."

"Never!"

"Hollis!"

"Yes."

"Do you know that I never intend to marry Lieutenant Withers, and that I've told him so for the last time?"

"What?"

"I have! I never intend to marry any one," she concluded solemnly. "It is all settled, you see."

"Well! That is something——" I started to say, but I happened to glance down into her eyes just at the proper moment, and caught a merry and elfin sparkle in them—and something of yearning. So I made an impetuous, tentative gesture.

And then I had her in my arms, the moonlight brilliant on the long, black tresses which somehow had become unloosened; so that I thought for a minute that I was not Hollis Pembleton at all, but a gallant, adventurous *conquistador,* and that this was Wihake, the Indian girl whose beneficent spirit would henceforth and for always guard the tranquility and sanctuary of the neutral strip.

THE END.

PUTTING ON

MOST of us dislike affectation, hate to see a man putting on. But just what is affectation, anyway? Suppose, for example, you hear a man pronouncing a word in a way that you know was not natural to him as a boy; suppose that his old way of pronouncing it and the new way are correct as far as the dictionary goes; but that the new way is considered, by a cultivated class of people, as the better way. Are you justified in calling your man affected? Is he putting on airs; or is he simply trying to better himself?

The example we have given is just an example and nothing more. Cases in point might be sighted in more important fields. But you get the idea.

Some one has said that a man is affected if he does something in a manner not natural to him in order to impress others, but that he is not affected if he does it to please himself. But that test is probably just peanut butter. Generally a man pleases himself by pleasing somebody else.

The true test probably is: *how well does he get away with it?*

Biblical Ballads in Modern Dress

By Berton Braley

ESAU STICKS TO HIS BARGAIN

I WAS hungry and I sold it,
Sold my birthright for a meal.
That's how Brother Jacob told it,
And I won't deny the deal.
Jacob has it, let him hold it;
That expresses what I feel.

Jacob wanted to inherit
All my portion—and his own.
Jacob's wily as a ferret,
As is generally known.
He has stripped me. I can bear it;
You won't hear me whine or groan.

Why should I bewail a dower
Which was, obviously, won
By the quarter of an hour
Which made me the elder son?
Shall I then grow sick and sour
Over what my brother's done?

I'm a farmer, a creator
Of the stuff by which men live;
Jacob is a speculator
Quick to take and slow to give.
What I sow makes Israel greater;
What he reaps is fugitive!

Sold my birthright to my brother?
Well, what of it? Sweat and soil
Shall, in time, win me another
From the earth-womb of the soil,
One I've earned myself—no other.
Jacob's welcome to his spoil!

For, through me, each tiny plottage
Shall return a hundredfold—
Food for palace and for cottage
Sprung from fructifying mold;
Aye, a glorious mess of pottage—
Worth the birthright that I sold!

A Chat With You

JEROME SYKES, the old-time comedian, used to sing a song in one of his shows that still lingers in the memory. Each verse would recite something of the doings of some eminent notable. Paul Revere making his famous ride, Washington refusing to tell a lie, Franklin discovering electricity with the aid of a kite—all these and others passed before you in the song. The chorus was always the same. Two lines of it remain in the memory. Perhaps some one who reads this remembers more—perhaps indeed, the song is somewhere preserved in print—but this is all we remember:

There is always something doing in the lives
of famous men;
Some pleasant little incident will turn up now
and then.

* * * *

MANY a true word is spoken in jest. The thing that makes great men famous is that there is always something doing in their lives. All really great men are profoundly original. They are never imitators. Just sticking to American history let us pick a few. Naturally we begin with Washington. There was never a man like him before and there will never be another like him. Some claim that he was a typical English country gentleman. He was nothing of the sort. A tough, outdoor fellow, a good writer after his fashion, a stubborn fighter, a prudent economist, a self-sacrificing and most honest man, but still a man with an eye to the main chance—and besides all this a man who liked a good time when it had been honestly earned—such was George, American through and through.

NOW let us take Jefferson. Here is a horse of quite another color. A man steeped in the ideas of the French Revolution. A man who, though well fitted for it in every way, dodged fighting in the War of the Revolution; learned, adroit, sharp as steel—a tall, red-haired gentlemen whom no one else could understand but who understood himself perfectly—such was the Sage of Monticello.

* * * *

LET us keep on and see how they differ one from another. Here is a man of Scotch blood, born in the West Indies. He is a financial genius, yet he wishes no dollar for himself. He is rather a believer in aristocracy and the centralization of power than in democracy. He is so chivalrous that he loses his life in a duel, in which he fired in the air and allowed his opponent to shoot him through the body. A game bird. His death made dueling forever unfashionable. The man who killed Alexander Hamilton never recovered from the shock.

* * * *

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS, all the folks of the Adams stock are quite as original in their own way. Hard to understand, difficult, uncompromising, durable as the rocks of New England, they stand for themselves. They are not like the Virginian Washington, nor the Scotch Hamilton. They are quite in a class by themselves.

* * * *

SHIFT once more and look at another man. His name is Andrew Jackson. Twice President of the United States, the man who did most to alter its government from a disguised

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aristocracy into a democracy, he had a sanguinary reputation as a duelist. He promised cheerfully to hang John C. Calhoun with his own hand in case Calhoun advocated secession from the union, and no one who knew the Honorable Jackson ever doubted his word when he made any remarks of that kind. Most kind and chivalrous to ladies, a good honest man but a terrible fighter, he spent his last days at a country home called "The Hermitage." And let us hope that those last days were happy ones.

* * * *

NOW the scene shifts to the period of the Civil War. Here we find another sort of fellow occupying the center of the stage. No one knows how he got there. He is not in the least like the great men of the past. He has not the classic poise and calm serenity of Washington. He has not the dash and vigor of Hamilton. He has not the refined culture of Adams nor the sharp ferocity of Jackson. He came from a log cabin. You know his name. It is Lincoln.

* * * *

THEY are all different. So are all original and natural people. That is the charm of life—its variety. It is true there are many imitators in the world but they don't count in the long run. In writing stories it is much the same as with other things. Some one might say, "Find a second B. M. Bower." It is impossible. There is only one B. M. Bower. The same rule applies to most of the writers of THE POPULAR.

The Popular Stories

In the Next Issue, December 24, 1927

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The Moose Yard — THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS

Partners — HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS
A Three-part Story—Part I.

The Candles of San Tomas — IDWAL JONES

Manageritis — WILLIAM SLAVENS McNUTT

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A Chat with You — THE EDITOR

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